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Allegiances

~COPYRIGHT STATEMENT REGARDING MY WARRIORS FICS~
I am putting this here simply because it has become quite an issue lately. Please DO NOT use my original characters/clans/concepts in any of your Warriors fics. (This does not include warriors cats with the same names. I understand coincidences if we happened to pick the same names for our characters.) I work hard on my novels, and it is upsetting to witness a circumstance where the author feels they need to "borrow" ideas/characters from me because they're not creative enough. Simply stated, the Warriors world is big and complex enough for an author to be able to create his or her own characters/clans/plot. Thank you for your understanding.

~STATEMENT REGARDING GRAMMATICAL ERRORS AND COMMENTS~

Please REFRAIN from continually correcting typos and grammatical errors. I am a grammar nazi myself, and I understand some of you are too, but I have several published works and do not have time to correct EVERY error. Unless the error severely limits your understanding of the story, I will not be taking immediate action to fix these typos. Please REFRAIN from telling me "cats can't cry" and "cats can't blush" etc. These novels are a work of FICTION. I know cats can't cry and perform human-like characteristics; however, this is a work of fiction and is written in a way to convey emotion. I am sick and tired of getting comments like these because they detract from my work and make it seem like you care more about correcting typos/ (sorry) being a pompous know-it-all than reading and enjoying a work. Don't be surprised if I get sassy/sarcastic with you in the comments. I ask you refrain from making such comments on my work.

Allegiances

MoonClan

Leader: Hazelstar- brown tabby she-cat with green eyes.

Deputy: Fire- ginger tabby tom with green eyes. Mate: Crystal

Warriors:

Bone- white tom with green eyes. Mate: Bloodfur

Bloodfur- dark ginger she-cat. Mate: Bone

Screechshade- brown she-cat. Mate: Fang

Fang- white tom with green eyes. Mate: Screechshade

Ice- white she-cat with blue eyes.

Cliff- light brown tabby tom. Mate: Raven

Raven: dark black she-cat with amber eyes. Mate: Cliff

Cherry: ginger she-cat.

Peach: light ginger she-cat with amber eyes

Berry: white and ginger she-cat with green eyes

Snowflake: white she-cat with blue eyes. Mate: Shard

Shard: gray tabby tom

(Only main warriors listed. Several rogues exist in this clan too)

Apprentices:

Serpentpaw: dark brown tabby tom

Lionpaw: light brown tabby tom

Crow: black tom with green eyes

Wolfpaw: white tom with green eyes

Arcticpaw: white she-cat with blue eyes

Graypaw: gray she-cat with green eyes

Nursery Queens:

Crystal: white she-cat

Kits:

Ember- ginger tabby tom

Flame- ginger she-cat with blue eyes

Thrush- white she-cat with green eyes

Cats Held Captive:

Warriors:

Treestep: brown tabby tom. Mate: Rosecloud

Rosecloud: calico she-cat with green eyes. Mate: Treestep. Kits: Blackkit, Brownkit, Copperkit

Chesnuttail: dusty brown tabby tom. Mate: Hollybreeze

Hollybreeze: black she-cat with green eyes.

Lavenderwhisker: white she-cat with green eyes. Mate: Nightclaw (deceased) Kits: Shadekit, Violetkit

Chesnutfur: dusty brown tabby tom.

Cloudfoot: white tom with green eyes

Rainwhisker: gray tabby tom

Tigerstripe: dark brown tabby tom. Mate: Jetfur

Jetfur: jet black she-cat with blue eyes. Mate: Tigerstripe

Kits:

Blackkit: black tom with blue eyes

Brownkit: brown tabby she-cat

Copperkit: ginger tabby tom

Violetkit: white she-cat with blue eyes

Shadekit: black tom with green eyes

Prologue

The Dark Forest was quiet and still, the only noise coming from the chirping of crickets, and the croaking of frogs. Damp moss hung from dead tree limbs, and a raven flew up ahead. No cat wanted to live here. Only those who deserved their punishment lived here.

Moonstar sat near the dark stream, watching as the raven flew past her. She growled as it flew by, looking back into the water below. In it she saw herself, the evil self, with glowing red eyes and unsheathed claws.

For moons, Moonstar had tried to seek revenge. She had possessed cats, messed with StarClan's powers, even convincing a young she-cat to train with her, but alas, it had all failed. StarClan's powers were too much for a small she-cat like her.

Moonstar wasn't ready to give up yet though. She needed to seek revenge of SnowClan and FoxClan, the clans that had betrayed her. She had a beautiful vision in mind, one that might work. All she had to do was convince some cat to listen.

Moonstar looked around, wondering if any cats stood in this forest too. She knew only a few cats had showed up here after perishing in the battle. Her mate was here, as well as her daughter. But other than that, only a few other cats walked these very woods.

"Perhaps if I speak to them, they shall agree with my plan," Moonstar said, walking away from the dark stream. She padded through the woods, wondering if any cat was nearby.

She had to admit, the Dark Forest was quite lonely. She could barely get into the StarClan borders without being sent back to her homeland. She had remembered her mother with dark and cold eyes hissing at her, "You'll never belong in these woods. Only the good live here, not the malicious ones that have evil running through their veins."

Moonstar had spat at her mother and run off back into the Dark Forest, but she still remembered the words. She remembered everything that had upset her. She remembered how her mother was too protective, she remembered those days when her mother had cherished Owlpaw more than her. She had remembered meeting Fang and allowing him to kill her mother for him. And then there was Blacktail, the cat she had killed her brother for. All of it had worked up to the battle that took place. That battle had been a failure though when the cursed cat, Lilywhisker, the daughter of Blacktail, had murdered her.

"Murderer," Moonstar spat out of rage. She knew that she-cat deserved to be in the Dark Forest more than any cat.

Back to her normal-self, Moonstar padded through the woods, knowing what she now had to do.

"Hazelnose," she spoke, whispering her daughter's familiar name. "Hazelnose shall work for me."

With those words, she disappeared back into the woods, as if she had never been there in the first place.

Chapter 1

Hazelnose yawned as she awoke, stretching her legs. The sun was shining up ahead, and she was in a calm and quiet forest. In fact, she had been living in the forest for quite some time. After the battle of MoonClan, she had retreated here, and she had been there ever since.

Hazelnose still remembered how she had turned to her mother's side. Her brother, Chesnuttail, had messed with her friend, Cloverpelt, too many times. After Cloverpelt had fallen for his tricks again, Hazelnose had tried to warn her friend, and she had fought off Chesnuttail and Cloverpelt. Sunstar, the leader of FoxClan, had soon found out of her attacking, and when Hazelnose attacked the leader, she was exiled. She then knew what her mother felt, and she had left to go to her side.

Hazelnose had remembered meeting the young tom, Rockclaw, while she spent her days in MoonClan. He had been charming and loving, and he had even broken up with his old mate just to be with her. Together he joined her, and one day, she had found out she was expecting his kits.

The joy was broken easily though when he died in the battle of MoonClan. Hazelnose had then left to these woods where she gave birth to a brown tabby tom. She named him Treekit, and she would make sure he destroyed the FoxClan cats once and for all. She had trained him hard, and she sent him to FoxClan, making sure Moonstar guided him there. She had not heard back from the tom or Moonstar though, and Hazelnose still wondered if her son was even alive.

Hazelnose shook the thoughts away, padding through the woods in search of prey. It was green-leaf, so there was plenty of prey to go around. She sniffed the air, suddenly spotting a squirrel nearby. She leapt, killing it in a swipe.

As she ate it, she remembered her lessons on killing MoonClan, though they spoke about killing cats, not prey. She still wondered if retreating to MoonClan was a good idea.

Of course it was a good idea, Hazelnose thought. *You'd be nothing without MoonClan today. You'd just be a stupid FoxClan cat and coward like your brother.*

After her meal, Hazelnose washed it down with some fresh water from the stream. With not much to do, she decided a nice nap in the sun would feel good. Yawning, she nestled back down, falling asleep.

Hazelnose knew she was in the Dark Forest as soon as she opened her eyes. Everything was dark and creepy, and no life seemed to move through the entire place. Hazelnose knew she was here for a reason though, there had to be one.

Soon enough, she saw two paws, and she gasped as she saw two glowing red eyes. Her mother stepped out of the bush, a malicious grin on her face.

"Moonstar," Hazelnose immediately spoke, bowing down to her mother.

"Ah, Hazelnose, still thinking of me as your leader," she spoke, tracing a claw over the she-cat's head. "Very good. Now get up, get up."

Hazelnose stood up, her legs shaking. Though she was on her mother's side, she was still frightened of the she-cat, for she knew what her mother was capable of.

"M-Mother, why have you brought me here? I haven't seen you since—"

"Since I sent your son to FoxClan, I know," Moonstar said. "Sit down, Hazelnose."

Hazelnose nodded, and without thinking, she blurted, "Is he alive?" Moonstar eyed her and Hazelnose spoke again. "Is my son alive?"

Moonstar thought for a moment, then spoke. "Yes, your son is alive in FoxClan, though I'm afraid you'll be disappointed of what he's become. That matter is not important though, Hazelnose. What matters is the revival of MoonClan."

"Revival of MoonClan?" Hazelnose asked with curiousity.

"Yes," Moonstar spoke. "I have tried several things over these past moons, and nothing has worked. I've tortured the lives of many cats, but StarClan still remains too strong. I recently however thought of a plan."

"A plan, Mother?" Hazelnose asked, lifting an eyebrow.

"I cannot get past the powers of StarClan, and though the Dark Forest's powers are strong, I cannot bring MoonClan back. There is, however, a way to do so. If one cat, let's say, was able to find the members and bring them back together, the Dark Forest could strengthen all of us."

"One cat? Do you mean...me?" Hazelnose gasped.

Moonstar nodded. "Precisely, Hazelnose, you exactly. You are not a dead cat like me, but a living one. If you would be able to find the members, MoonClan would be unstoppable."

"Moonstar, I can't. It's impossible. I couldn't even receive lives," Hazelnose argued.

Moonstar shoved the she-cat down, and Hazelnose froze. "But you will," Moonstar whispered. Hazelnose gagged, her breath reeking of blood. "It is not an impossible task, and StarClan will be able to grant you some lives, Hazelnose, but not all."

"A-Are you sure?" Hazelnose asked.

Moonstar slowly loosened her grip, letting Hazelnose stand up once again. Once Hazelnose had done so, Moonstar spoke. "Yes, positive. Hazelnose, you must complete this task, or the consequences will be," she looked at her unsheathed claws, then set them back down, "deadly."

Hazelnose gulped, completely understanding her mother. "What do I have to do? Who do I seek?"

Moonstar smiled. "Ah, just the matter I was about to discuss. Many died in the battle, but others still survive. Some, however, have changed, losing their evil ways. It is your job to take them prisoner and force them to join. Do you understand?"

Hazelnose nodded. "Yes. Now who do I look for?"

"Bone," Moonstar spoke slowly. "Do not make him deputy. He is a fool, but he will still fight. Also look for his daughter, Ice, and her son, Fire. Fire shall be deputy, for he also possesses the same evil as you and me."

"Bone, Fire, Ice, anyone else?" Hazelnose asked.

Moonstar nodded. "Bloodfur and Screechshade, the two sisters. Do you remember them?"

Hazelnose nodded. "Yes, Mother, I do."

"Search for Tigerstripe, your brother, and Jetfur, another former MoonClan warrior. Also find Fang, the son of Leopardtail and Tooth. Now, several of my kin live in FoxClan, so you must pay a visit there too."

Hazelnose nodded, remembering the terrible clan she had been raised in. "Who do I look for in FoxClan?"

"All the kin, Hazelnose. Your brother and his kin. Search for your son, and his kin, if any. Find Rainwhisker, Ice's son, and Cloudfoot, the son of your sister."

"Yes, Moonstar, I shall," Hazelnose said, dipping her head.

"Listen wisely now, Hazelnose," Moonstar said, tracing a claw under Hazelnose's throat. "It is best to get rogues to join you first before you head to FoxClan. They will probably refuse to leave, so find your loyal warriors first."

"I will, Moonstar. I promise I will," Hazelnose spoke loudly,

wondering how she could ever be trusted with such a dangerous mission.

"Good, very good. You'll find the old camp is still there, unoccupied. Head to Moonstone where you'll receive your nine lives first though. Clean up the camp, and find the others," Moonstar instructed.

"Yes, Moonstar," Hazelnose said.

"Don't fail me," Moonstar warned her.

"I promise you, I won't," Hazelnose said. She took a deep breath, then said, "If I do, my life is yours to take."

Moonstar smiled maliciously. "Perfect. Now go! Begin!"

The world began to vanish, and all Hazelnose could see were two blood red eyes, staring deeply at her. She then blacked out.

Chapter 2

Hazelnose knew the first place she had to journey to was the old MoonClan camp itself. There, she would be able to find Moonstone and receive her lives, and she would make sure the camp was structured again.

Hazelnose was sad to leave her old forest, but she knew she could not fail Moonstar. She had to prove her loyalty.

Hazelnose padded through the woods, looking at the woods below. She knew she did not have to travel far to find the old camp, but she still didn't want to embark on a week long journey.

She was nervous as she thought about what the other members would think. Would they join? Had Moonstar come to them too? Hazelnose hoped Fire would accept to be her deputy...

Hazelnose wondered what would happen when she kidnapped the FoxClan cats who were Moonstar's kin. She would finally see her son again. Maybe then she'd have a chance to kill him. And Chesnuttail, didn't he die in the battle of MoonClan? She shrugged, confused. Maybe he hadn't.

She wondered about Tigerstripe. She hadn't seen him since he had gone off with Jetfur after Bone had claimed MoonClan was over. She was sure he was still his evil-self. She wondered if Chesnuttail or Tigerstripe had any kits. Leopardtail had given birth to Tooth's kits shortly before her death. Were they even still alive?

All these thoughts ran through Hazelnose's mind as she began to race through the forest. It felt good, running past all the trees. The wind flew in her face, and she felt free, almost. Her life hadn't been too great anyway, and maybe staying out here in these woods was the best life for her.

"No, I must complete this mission," Hazelnose growled to herself.

She continued on her way, trying to ignore the hot green-leaf sun. She went over how she would run the camp in her head, expecting that if everything went well, they would be able to seek vengeance by leaf-fall.

She continued on her way, walking at a fast speed. As she walked, she heard a rustle in the bushes. She froze, turning to see a rabbit nibbling on a berry. Licking her lips, she unsheathed her claws and leapt, killing it in one swipe.

She ate the rabbit quickly, continuing on her way. She walked for awhile, walking faster and faster, even running at times. She was trying to shorten the trip as much as she could.

The sun was beginning to set though, and she knew soon she'd be walking in the dark. She'd probably be forced to find a place to sleep until morning.

She watched as the orange and pink skies began to fade, and she could see the slightest bit of stars, twinkling and dancing in the sky. Hazelnose tilted her head, remembering as a tiny kit in FoxClan when she had looked at the same stars, and she had felt free, knowing she was safe from harm.

Oh, that had changed once she became a warrior, and after that, everything had changed. Hazelnose still remembered how Blacktail had saved her and her brother and had taken them to FoxClan. She had remembered feeling so happy, so loved. Why had that faded away?

"Stop it," she spat. "You're acting like a soft-hearted kittypet. You're a MoonClan cat now," she spat, unsheathing her claws.

Something kept allowing her to look at the stars though. Why couldn't she turn away? Was it because she had heard legends of StarClan cats up there? Hazelnose sighed, knowing she would never walk with StarClan.

"The Dark Forest is my home now," she whispered.

With those words, she laid down next to a tree and closed her eyes, drifting asleep.

Hazelnose awoke the next morning to find birds chirping loudly, and everything seemed to be at peace. Hazelnose knew nothing would be at peace in the next few moons though. Blood would be spilled, lives taken, and she would cause all of it to seek revenge.

As Hazelnose thought of all the betrayal, she became angry, and she unsheathed her claws, scraping the ground. "MoonClan lives on!" she yowled, beginning to race through the woods quickly.

She raced through the woods, adrenaline racing through her veins. Birds quickly flew away up ahead, flying above her. She stopped soon, coming to a dead silent portion of the forest. Nothing stirred or moved, and all she could hear was her breathing.

Hazelnose slowly walked through the woods, keeping her eyes peeled to make sure she didn't run into any trouble. She walked step by step, gazing around. She froze, hearing a twig snap. Hazelnose turned, spotting something run by.

"Come out, you coward!" she spat, unsheathing her claws. "I'm not afraid of you!" Nothing moved though, and Hazelnose continued on, her claws still unsheathed.

She saw something move by again, and she turned, hissing. She heard a low growl, and she tilted her head. "Come out!" she spat.

Suddenly, a fox leapt out of the bushes, snarling at her. Hazelnose didn't flinch though. Weakness did not exist in MoonClan cats.

She yowled as she landed on the fox, beginning to claw at it. The fox screeched and latched its teeth on her leg. She kicked its nose, and it released its grip. With her bloody leg, Hazelnose continued to fight the fox, yowling loudly.

She clawed at its legs, though the fox would not give up.

Hazelnose wouldn't back down from the fight though. No, she would continue to fight this fox until one of them died.

Suddenly, Hazelnose heard bushes being rattled, and suddenly, a large ginger tom leapt on the fox, beginning to fight it as well. Hazelnose wasn't sure who this tom was, but she certainly wasn't going to let him win the fox.

Hazelnose leapt back at the fox, knocking it over. It fell down hard, and she scraped her claw against its throat, killing it instantly. Out of breath, Hazelnose backed away, her paws stained with blood.

"Thanks," she said slowly to the unknown ginger tom. He looked up, and she saw two familiar green eyes. "Fire?!"

"Hazelnose?!" he gasped.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"I'm just passing through. What are *you* doing here?"

"Well, that's a good question. Sit, there's something I need to discuss with you," she said.

"Why should I trust you?" Fire asked.

Hazelnose took a step close to him, hissing, "Because Moonstar insists you listen."

At these words, Fire immediately sat, growling. "What? What does Moonstar want?"

"MoonClan is returning," Hazelnose told him. "She's made me the leader, and I'm looking for members to rejoin."

"Why should I rejoin? Everything went wrong last time. I lost a sister, and my brother ran off," Fire complained.

"You were a *kit*!" Hazelnose told him. "She's asked me to make *you* the deputy. By all means, go against her orders, but that doesn't mean there won't be consequences," she said, unsheathing a

claw.

"Keep your claws sheathed. I'm listening," he said.

"It is my job to bring the old members and their kin back, as well as take those in FoxClan captive. Your brother is one of them," she said.

Fire smiled maliciously. "I like this plan. I'd be thrilled to be MoonClan's deputy. I still have that evil flare in me," he laughed.

Hazelnose smiled. "Good, very good. I am on my way to the old camp to receive my nine lives and to fix up the camp. I will then find other members. Please, join me."

Fire smiled. "Okay, I'll join you, Hazelnose. Why hasn't Moonstar mentioned anything to me though?"

Hazelnose shrugged. "I don't know. Ask her. She came to me though."

"Are you sure it wasn't an illusion?" he asked.

Hazelnose hissed at him. "Don't be such a mousebrain, Fire! I never liked your attitude to begin with! I am telling you all that I know. Now, where is your mother?"

Fire shrugged. "I left her moons ago. She's probably wandering somewhere in these woods. Maybe Moonstar will send her a dream," he joked.

"I swear, Fire, you better learn how to control your tongue. Now, do you know where your mother is?"

"No, I don't," Fire honestly told her. "But I'm sure we'll be able to find her."

"Okay, good. Now, please, Fire, be a loyal MoonClan member," Hazelnose told him.

"Fine. I am now the deputy of MoonClan and a loyal member. Are you happy?" he asked.

"I think you should ask Moonstar is she's happy. I don't think she's appreciating your attitude," Hazelnose told him. "Now, come on. We can rest up. My leg still hurts."

Together they continued their way, finding herbs to heal wounds. Afterwards, Hazelnose decided to rest, as well as Fire. Hazelnose closed her eyes, drifting off.

"I promise!" Fire's yowl awoke Hazelnose. She turned, seeing a trickle of blood against his pelt.

"What happened?!" she asked.

"Moonstar. She-she came to me, and she did this," he said, pointing to the blood trickling down his pelt. "I'm sorry. I'm your deputy now, and I will treat you like I treated Moonstar. Please, don't make her come again," he whimpered.

Hazelnose laughed a little. He sounded like a tiny kit. "I can't control what Moonstar does, but your treatment of me does matter. I accept your apology, Fire. Now, come on. We've got to get to the old MoonClan camp," she said.

Together, they walked off, and Hazelnose smiled. Her clan was coming together.

Chapter 3

It had been six sunrises, and Hazelnose knew that she and Fire would arrive at the old MoonClan camp in a sunrise or so. He had turned out to be loyal, a perfect deputy, and Hazelnose was glad she was getting to know the tom better. He had only been a kit during the first battle.

Hazelnose awoke now, watching the sun peak above the hills. Today would be their seventh day out in the journey, and she knew she had to find MoonClan today. She stood up, sniffing the air. The fresh air smelled familiar, and she knew she was close.

Hazelnose watched as Fire's eyes opened. "What is it?" he murmured.

"We're almost there," Hazelnose told him.

Fire groaned. "My legs are sore from all this walking. Can't we wait until the sun is fully risen?" he complained.

"Of course not!" Hazelnose spat. "Moonstar has entrusted me with this mission, and I will not fail her!"

Fire grumbled, getting up. She watched as he stretched, and she realized how sleep-deprived he was. He obviously wasn't used to all this walking before.

"What have you been doing all these moons?" she asked him.

Fire shrugged. "I move from place to place. Fang and I did join a clan once, but we left a moon later. It wasn't right for us. I've been on my own now. I left Ice when I was twelve moons."

"Well, your battle skills don't seem to be failing," Hazelnose said, seeing the pale scars on his legs.

"Cats come around, sometimes foxes and badgers. Thank

StarClan for MoonClan. I've won every fight I've been in," he told her. There was a pause, and then he eyed Hazelnose. "Where have *you* been all this time?"

"That is none of your concern!" Hazelnose spat.

"But it is. You asked me, now I ask you," Fire told her.

"Respect your leader!" Hazelnose spat. "Have you not forgotten the lesson Moonstar taught you only a few sunrises ago? Now, do not ask again. You are inferior to me, Fire. Don't think otherwise."

Fire growled. "All right. Fine. I won't ask again. Can we at least catch some prey before continuing?" he asked.

"Very well," Hazelnose said. Together, they padded into dark woods. Only a faint strip of sunlight shined through, leaving them to walk through the darkened forest. The trees rustled in the green-leaf wind, and Hazelnose turned, sniffing a scent.

Before she could react, Fire leapt into the bushes, coming back with a plump rabbit. "Breakfast is served," he told her.

"My, you have keen instincts," Hazelnose told him, sitting down to eat the rabbit.

"Mother always said it was a gift," he told her, biting into the rabbit. With his mouth full, he spoke, "This rabbit is delicious!"

Hazelnose couldn't help but laugh a little. "You still act like a kit at times," she told him.

"I am a warrior, not a kit," he said, swallowing his bite of rabbit. "My brother-he's a kit. My sister walks either in the Dark Forest or StarClan. But I, the only surviving kin, am not a *kit*."

"Very well. You are not a kit," Hazelnose told him.

The rabbit was gone after a few moments, and Hazelnose stood up, ready to walk again. She knew all they had to do now was get over the hill, and on top would be the old MoonClan camp.

"Do we have to leave so soon?" Fire complained.

"Get up, Fire! The camp is just over the hill!" she told him with excitement.

"Just over the hill, you say? Why, that rocky terrain won't make me sore at all!" he remarked sarcastically.

"Oh, hush!" Hazelnose told him. She knew over those hills was where her brother's kin lay, over those hills was where the enemies lay, over those hills was revenge...

"Come on!" she said, beginning to race through the forest. Though Fire started off a bit late, he was able to catch up to her, and he ran alongside her.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" he asked. "What if there are other clan cats in the area?" he asked.

"We'll kill them if they bother us," Hazelnose told him, still running. "Now move, Fire, move!"

As the day moved on, they continued to run and walk, at times stopping for prey or a drink of water. Though Fire had complained earlier, he did not complain as they continued, and he didn't show any sign of fatigue either. He was, like Hazelnose expected, a MoonClan cat.

Soon, the sun had begun to set, and they had met no other clan cats along the way. Everything had been quiet and peaceful for them to venture.

"We're almost near the top," Hazelnose told him. "I can't wait to breath in the scent again!"

"I barely remember what the scent smells like," Fire remarked. "Do you think the battlefield is still there?"

"Of course it is," Hazelnose told him, remembering the bloody meadow near the FoxClan border. She had remembered the howls of victory, the bloodshed everywhere. She had remembered herself being in fear as Rockclaw died in front of her, and carrying

his kit, she had run off. She remembered how Moonstar had visited her later in the Dark Forest, calling her a coward, a disgrace. She then told Hazelnose that her kits would have to serve MoonClan, and Hazelnose agreed.

"Hazelnose," Fire said, making her lose her train of thought.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I thought I heard something," Fire told her.

"It's probably just a bird," Hazelnose told him. "No need to be scared."

"I'm serious, Hazelnose. This isn't a piece of prey. I swore I saw a tail..."

"A clan cat, eh? We can wipe them out in seconds," she said, unsheathing her claws.

"I don't know about this, Hazelnose," Fire told her. She watched as he unsheathed his claws too, and together they stood, looking around the woods. The sun had almost set now, shading the forest in darkness.

"Who's there?!" Hazelnose spat. "Show yourself, cat!"

Nothing stirred, and she froze, looking around. Perhaps Fire had seen nothing and they should continue on their way. Something didn't feel right though...

Suddenly, Hazelnose saw a bush rattle. She turned to Fire, and they slowly padded towards it, their pawsteps making no sound.

Suddenly, Hazelnose leapt into the bush, pinning down a cat. She hissed, raising her claw about to kill the unknown cat, when suddenly she recognized two blue eyes, and the cat wailed.

"No, please! It's me! Hazelnose, it's me!" she wailed.

"Ice?" Fire asked. Hazelnose looked down, remembering the

icy blue eyes and white pelt.

"Hazelnose, get off her!" Fire spat.

Hazelnose nodded, letting the she-cat go. She stood up, wiping the dirt off her white pelt. "Fire, it's good to see you again, son! What have you been up to?"

"We aren't here to chat," Hazelnose told her.

"I know that," Ice hissed. "I was nearing the old camp because Moonstar came to me in a dream." She paused, looking at both Fire and Hazelnose. "I suppose that is why you are here too."

"Precisely," Fire told her. "Moonstar has made Hazelnose the leader, and I am her deputy."

"My son, a deputy! I'm so proud!" Ice told him, rushing towards him. Hazelnose blocked her from him though.

"There will be time for reunions later. We must complete the journey now. MoonClan is at the top of this hill. I assume you're coming, Ice."

Ice nodded. "Oh, yes. Let's get going. I'll lead the way," she offered.

"That's my job," Hazelnose told her.

"All right, fine, lead the way," Ice growled.

Hazelnose had never liked the white she-cat, and even though she desperately wanted to kill the she-cat off, something had stopped her. Hazelnose didn't know why but she recognized another cat in Ice, a cat she couldn't remember the name of or even picture. It reminded her of love, of happiness. It wasn't a cat in FoxClan though. Had it been one in MoonClan?

Hazelnose shook the thoughts away, looking up to see they were near the top of the hill. With excitement, she sprinted, and Fire and Ice followed behind her, racing up the hill. Rocks tumbled down below as she sprinted, not that she cared. Soon, she came

onto a grassy area and froze.

There it was...The MoonClan camp.

Chapter 4

Hazelnose crept into the abandoned camp, making sure no cat was living in there. Most of the dens were collapsed, some bones lay around camp. She shuddered at the dried patches of blood spread throughout the camp. It was as if all her memories flashed back to her.

"Is the coast clear?" Ice asked.

Hazelnose nodded, not sniffing any cat. "No cat has been here in moons," she told her. "We've got to get started right away on rebuilding."

"No kidding," Fire said, looking at the old dens. "What if we got some rogues to help?"

"Good idea, Fire," Hazelnose told him, glad the tom was finally cooperating. "We do need more members- rogues especially. But first, I must receive my lives."

"Don't be silly, Hazelnose," Ice told her. "Moonstar never received any lives. What makes you think you will?"

"Trust me on this! Moonstar said I would," Hazelnose growled. "I'll be on my way to Moonstone. You two look for some rogues and help clean up. Move the bones away, fix up the dens."

"All right," Ice said. "As you wish, *Hazelstar*."

"Good," Hazelnose said. "If you aren't here when I return, I assume you're out looking for members. If you dare think you can leave, the powers of the Dark Forest will be on your tail, so I suggest you *stay*," she spat.

"Message understood," Fire said.

Hazelnose looked back at the mother and son one last time,

then disappeared into the woods. She remembered everything so clearly-the trees, the smells, the sights. It was as if she had never left.

She burst through the woods, knowing Moonstone wasn't too far away. She had heard FoxClan cats speak of it. It was up in the foothills, near the MoonClan camp. It wouldn't be too far of a walk!

The sun had disappeared now, and the stars had begun to shine. The darkness would allow her to blend in better, and she thanked her father for her darkened pelt.

As she continued, she stopped, smelling the scents of other cats. That was odd. She swore there were no other clans around here. In fact, the only clans in the forest had been FoxClan and MoonClan at the time of the battle.

She continued slowly through the woods, still smelling the cats. There were very few of them, and it definitely did not smell like a clan of any sort. She tried to ignore the scents, continuing on her way.

She suddenly spotted a pair of ears above the bushes. She looked quickly, seeing them gone. Who was out in these woods?

"Who's there?" she asked quietly.

When no response came, she continued. If any cat came out, she'd kill it right there and then. That's what she would do...That's what Moonstar would do, right?

Suddenly, she felt paws kick her into a bush, and she yowled as a large tom landed on her. In the darkness, she could spot his dark stripes, and his green eyes stared deeply into hers.

"Who are you?! What are you doing on BirdClan territory?!" he spat.

"BirdClan territory? What are you talking about?" she asked, pushing the tom off.

"This is BirdClan territory," he spat. "Who are you?"

"My identity is of no importance to you. Who are you?" she asked.

"Bumblestar, leader of BirdClan. Get off our territory," he spat. He took a step closer, sniffing her. "That's odd. You don't smell of the other clans."

"That's because I belong to no clan!" she spat, knowing she could not give away the rebuilding of MoonClan to this tom. "I'm passing through, you mouse-brain."

"Mouse-brain? That's clan talk. You are from a clan, aren't you?"

"Fox-dung," she silently cursed. "I pick up slang from the cats around here. Let me through. I'm just passing by!"

"Where are you going to?" he asked.

"Somewhere that's not here," she told him. "Goodness, just let me through, cat!"

"No one passes through BirdClan territory without an explanation," he warned her.

"I'm a rogue heading through the forest. Leave me be!" she spat, knocking him down. "I'm not afraid to kill cats who get in my way," she said, tracing a claw over the tom's throat.

"Fine, fine! You may pass, but if I catch you here again, we will take you prisoner," he spat.

"Doubt that," she mumbled, passing by. Glad to be free of Bumblestar and the BirdClan cats, she began to run, heading towards Moonstone. She could see the cave up ahead, the bright blue light shining from it.

"I'm almost there," she breathed, continuing to race through the woods. Her stomach churned though as she thought what would happen when she got there. Was Moonstar correct? Would she

receive some lives?

"Yes, you will," Hazelnose told yourself, slowing down as she neared the cave. The bright light seemed to blind anything near it, and Hazelnose even thought of turning around, feeling ashamed to enter a place of StarClan when she did not belong in such a place.

"You're acting like a kittypet," she spat to herself, heading towards the cave. She watched as the stars faded, and she disappeared into the den. Inside, a bright blue stone sat in the center.

Hazelnose slowly made her way towards it, hearing the tiny drops of water touch the cave floor. She jumped as she stepped on a twig. She laughed a little, coming towards the stone. There it sat- unharmed and perfect.

"Moonstone," she whispered, gazing at the holy object. She had heard stories as a kit of the acclaimed stone, but she had never seen it in real life. It was even more amazing looking at it.

With all the might she had, Hazelnose edged towards the stone, its light blinding her eyes. She stepped closer, touching her nose to the stone. Immediately, she felt a cool presence, and everything faded.

When Hazelnose could regain vision, she was not in StarClan, but in the Dark Forest, and her mother stood right in front of her.

"Mother!" she gasped.

"Hush, Hazelnose! I don't have much time," she growled. "We're fighting off StarClan's powers right now in order to give you your lives. I must give you your lives quickly."

"Will I receive all nine?" Hazelnose asked.

"I do not have enough power to give you all nine, but I will be giving you four. Use them wisely," Moonstar warned her.

"With this first life, I give you stealth. Use it to break down

your enemies and seek revenge," Moonstar told her. She took a step close to Hazelnose, touching her nose to hers. Immediately, Hazelnose felt as if her whole body was on fire, and the burning sensation continued for a few more moments before there was some relief.

"With your second life, I give you wisdom. Use it for strategies," Moonstar explained. Hazelnose braced herself for the second life. As Moonstar touched her nose, she felt light as a feather, and a warming sensation filled her.

"With your third life, I give you strength. Use it to destroy your enemies!" Moonstar yowled, touching her nose to Hazelnose's. Hazelnose didn't have any time to react, and she suddenly felt as if her body was being bruised and crushed all over.

Hazelnose weakly opened her eyes, waiting for her last life. "With this life, I give you leadership. I know you will use it well, Hazelstar," Moonstar said, touching her nose to Hazelnose's.

Hazelnose suddenly felt as if her whole body was iced over, and when she opened her eyes, everything was fading, and all she could see was the glow of Moonstar's blood red eyes that quickly flashed green.

When Hazelnose awoke, she was laying in the den, the Moonstone still shining brightly. She felt a different sensation over her, and she knew now that she was Hazelstar, the leader of MoonClan.

Hazelstar got up and stretched her legs, glad the plan had worked. Suddenly, the whole cave began to rattle and vibrate, and Hazelstar looked around.

"What's going on?" she gasped.

Suddenly, a white she-cat appeared with glowing blue eyes. "You have used a gift from StarClan inappropriately! You used the Dark Forest to get what you wanted, and now, you will pay!"

"No!" Hazelstar hissed, beginning to run out of the den. The

cave shook violently, and rocks began to fall, nearly blocking the entrance. Knowing she wouldn't make it in time, she leapt, making it through an entryway right as the last rock fell. Without looking back, Hazelstar ran, running quickly into the woods. Once she could run no further, she stopped, catching her breath.

"That was close," she breathed, walking silently in the woods. The stars still shined bright up above, but Hazelstar felt ashamed to be in the presence of them. She did not belong to StarClan anymore, but the Dark Forest.

"Hush! StarClan cats aren't in the stars!" she spat, continuing along her way. She stopped, smelling the familiar BirdClan scent again. She had to get through though, so she leapt up a nearest tree and began jumping from tree to tree in order to avoid the cats.

As she went by, she noticed the small camp with a few cats sleeping in there.

"Some great clan," she mumbled, continuing by. Once she could no longer smell the BirdClan scent, she leapt back down from the tree, beginning to walk back to camp. She could spot it now, and she began to run, excited to tell Fire and Ice the exciting news of her leadership.

As she got into camp, she smelled some different scents. She looked, seeing Fire and Ice talking to three other cats.

"Fire, who are these cats?!" Hazelstar spat.

"Hazelnose, you're back! How'd it go?" Fire asked.

"It's Hazel*star* now," she said. "Now answer my question, deputy."

"Hazelstar, this is Crystal," he said, pointing to a beautiful white she-cat. "This is Cliff," he said, pointing to a light brown tabby tom. Lastly, he pointed to a black she-cat with bright amber eyes. "This is Raven, Cliff's mate," Fire said. "They've got a kit too."

"Are they here to join?" Hazelstar asked.

"Yes," Crystal said. "We would love to join you in your search for vengeance."

"Your kit, where is it?" Hazelstar asked Raven.

"Follow me," Raven said, leading her to one of the standing dens. Inside lay one kit. "I do not know if you him to have a clan name or not," Raven told her.

"It is up to you," Hazelstar said.

"I will not then," Raven said. "The tom's name is Crow, and he's a moon old," Raven said, looking at the sleeping kit.

"He shall be a MoonClan warrior," Hazelstar smiled maliciously. "Rest now. Tomorrow we will be rebuilding."

"Yes, Hazelstar," Raven said, giving a slight bow. Hazelstar laughed, heading outside. The only den standing was the one Crow slept in. Growling, Hazelstar picked up the kit, tossing him outside.

Cliff immediately raced to his kit. "Hazelstar! What's the idea?!" he spat.

Hazelstar pushed Cliff aside. "I am leader, you fool! This is the only den left standing, and it will not house a kit. Take your kit with you! He will sleep in a den once they are rebuilt."

She watched as Cliff opened his mouth to argue, but he didn't. He picked up the whining Crow and walked away.

Hazelstar padded into her den, laying down on the nest that Crow was sleeping in. Resting her head on her paws, she slowly fell asleep.

Chapter 5

Hazelstar's eyes slowly opened to see a bright and sunny day. She rose slowly, yawning as she awoke. Today, they would be searching for more members and rebuilding the camp.

She headed outside to find Fire already instructing cats to begin gathering materials. She was glad she had chosen him as her deputy.

"Good morning, Hazelstar," he said, bowing his head.

"Good morning, Fire. Did you send these cats off to work?" she asked.

Fire nodded. Hazelnose turned, watching Ice return with some sticks while Crystal hung up some sticks and branches. She watched little Crow helping as well.?

"Perfect," she purred. "Now, Fire," she said.

He turned, his green eyes staring into hers. "Yes, Hazelstar?"

"Keep on working these cats and telling them what to do. I'll be in the woods looking for some more members, okay? If Ice was told to come, I expect others will be arriving soon. I guess it's best to meet them halfway."

"When will you return?" Fire asked.

"By this evening," Hazelstar told him.

"Hazelstar, wait!" Crystal shouted.

Hazelstar turned, looking at the white she-cat. "Is there something you desire?" she asked.

"I only offer help," Crystal told her. "Cliff, Raven, and I come from a group of rogues. We decided it would be better to travel on

our own, but the group still listens greatly to me. If it is not too much trouble, I would like to ask if I may come with you. I'd be gone for a few days though to find my group, but I'd return with nearly thirty cats."

"Thirty cats!" Hazelstar gasped. They did need more rogues, and though their camp was nowhere big enough, she had vaguely remembered her mother sheltering them outside the camp and supplying them with prey.

"Fine, you may travel with me," she told the she-cat. "If you step a paw out of line, I have no problem killing you right there. You return in three days time. You hear me, she-cat?"

"Y-Yes, Hazelstar. Three days will be fine," Crystal gulped.

"Good. Now come with me."

"Wait, Crystal," Fire spoke. She turned, and Hazelstar impatiently waited.

"Be safe," he told her.

"Thanks," she said.

Hazelstar eyed Fire who seemed to drool over she-cat. Would she be getting in the way of his deputyship?

Crystal walked alongside Hazelstar as they headed into the forest, and she did not speak a word.

Good, Hazelstar thought. *I need loyal warriors.*

"Are you hungry?" Hazelstar asked.

"If it isn't too much trouble, I wouldn't mind eating a rabbit," Crystal told her.

"Well, we're in the same boat. I left without breakfast. Follow me," she said, leading Crystal through some bushes. The she-cat stood, ready to question Hazelstar, when suddenly Hazelstar leapt into the air, killing a rabbit with one swipe as it leapt from

one bush to another.

"Fabulous catch, Hazelstar," she said.

"Want to share?"

"Sure," Crystal said. The two sat down near the bushes where they ate the juicy rabbit. Green-leaf was supplying an endless amount of food, so Hazelstar knew no cat would go hungry.

"And your mother is the leader of MoonClan, correct?"

"She was," Hazelstar told her. "She unfortunately was killed in battle. I am keeping her promise and rebuilding MoonClan."

"What a loving daughter," Crystal told her.

If only she knew the price, Hazelstar thought, knowing Moonstar would kill her if she failed.

After finishing the meal, the two headed farther into the woods. Hazelstar sniffed around, hoping to find some MoonClan cat somewhere.

"Are you sure you'll find old members here?" Crystal asked.

"Quiet," Hazelstar spat. "They were told to come here, so they must be on their way."

As she spoke, she noticed a flash of red. She sniffed a familiar scent, then leapt up the nearest tree.

"What are you doing?" Crystal asked.

"For StarClan's sake, be quiet!" she spat.

She looked down, seeing a blood red she-cat with a familiar white tom. Four young warriors stood by their side as they walked along. Hazelstar sat in the tree, her tail swaying.

"Is this the correct way?" the she-cat asked.

"I know my way," the tom argued.

"Bone, Bloodfur, is that you?" Hazelstar asked, leaping down from the tree.

"Hazelnose, you scared me!" Bloodfur gasped.

"It's Hazel*star*, your new leader. I assume you're here to join MoonClan, correct?" Hazelstar asked.

"We weren't asked, we were told," Bone hissed.

"Ah, Bone, you're such a grump," Hazelstar laughed. "Are these your four kits?"

Bloodfur nodded. "Yes. They're quite beautiful, aren't they? Four daughters."

"They'll be perfect warriors," Hazelstar said, smiling maliciously at the four she-cats. Each looked at her in fear.

"Hazelstar, are you there?" Crystal asked, heading through the bush

Hazelstar groaned, hissing at the she-cat. She was too light-headed.

"*Yes, I am* here," she growled.

"Who's this?" Bloodfur asked.

"Just a stupid member," Hazelstar spat.

"I am not stupid," Crystal argued.

"Then do what you're told!" Hazelstar hissed at her. "Now, why don't you introduce the kits, Bloodfur."

She pointed to a dark ginger she-cat. "This is Cherry," she said.

Cherry bowed down to Hazelstar. "I am thrilled to be in your clan," she spoke. Hazelstar watched her quiver as she stood up.

"You've taught them well," she said, looking at Bone.

"Thank you," he said, boasting out his chest.

"Don't try to kiss up to me, you coward," she spat.

He looked at her, confused. "What do you mean?"

"You called off the old clan, Bone. Moonstar's completely lost your trust. You're lucky I don't kill you now."

"I am not deputy?"

"No!" she spat. "Your grandson, Fire, is. Now who are the rest of the she-cats?"

"This is Peach," Bloodfur said, pointing to a light ginger she-cat with the same amber eyes as her mother.

"This is Berry," she said, pointing to a white and ginger she-cat with Bone's green eyes.

"And this is Snowflake," Bloodfur said, turning to the last she-cat. She was a pure white, like Bone, with striking blue eyes.

The four she-cats bowed, and Hazelstar smiled. "They don't have tough names," she spoke.

"They don't *need* tough names," Bone spat at her.

"You chose one, Bone. Or should I say, *Whitestar*?"

"Don't speak my old name. I don't belong to that life anymore," Bone growled.

"But you do, Whitestar. Moonstar told me all about how you turned down your leadership for her clan and forced your family into it. Your mate was killed, your son died moons ago, and now all you have left is your widowed daughter."

"That's enough!" Bone spat. "I have come to join this clan out of Moonstar's orders."

The other cats remained silent as Hazelstar unsheathed her

claws. "Yes, because if you don't, I'll kill you," she said, tracing a claw against his throat.

"Bloodfur," she said, turning the she-cat.

The she-cat immediately bowed down. "What is it?"

"Your sister, Screechshade, is she still around?" Hazelstar asked.

"Y-Yes, Hazelstar. I don't know her whereabouts, but Moonstar should've conveyed her message," the old she-cat spoke.

"Good," Hazelstar said. She turned to Crystal who also quivered in fear. "This is where I leave you, Crystal. Three days!" she yowled.

"Yes, Hazelstar!" Crystal spoke, running off.

"What's that all about?" Bloodfur asked.

"The she-cat has graciously offered to bring thirty rogues here to help us win."

"So it'll just be like last time?" Bone asked. "Where we told all rogues to head home."

"That does it!" Hazelstar spat, knocking the tom over. He was strong and muscular, but Hazelstar had her lives now, and her strength was stronger. She held him down, and he spat at her, trying to get free.

"If you will not participate in this clan, I will kill you right now," she spoke, her sharp claw slowly digging into his throat.

"NO!" Bloodfur spat.

Hazelstar stopped, turning to the she-cat. "What?"

"Don't kill him," Bloodfur begged. "I'll be sure he behaves."

Hazelstar looked at Bone one last time, watching the tiniest

drop of blood trickling from his throat.

"I won't kill him this time, but if he does misbehave, I'll be taking both your lives," Hazelstar hissed, letting the tom go.

As soon as Bone stood up, Bloodfur ran to his side. "Are you hurt?" she heard her whisper.

Hazelstar looked at the four kits who walked in fear. "You will not behave like your father with his same stubborn attitude," she told them.

"Of course, Hazelstar," Berry told her.

"Good," Hazelstar laughed, heading back to camp with the cats.

Once they did arrive in camp, Fire immediately ran to her side. He stopped, seeing Bone and Bloodfur.

"Bone, Bloodfur, is it you?" he asked.

Bone nodded. "Yes. Where's your mother?" he asked.

"In the den," Fire said, pointing his tail over towards the den. "Bloodfur, are these your kits?"

Bloodfur nodded.

"There's a free den that was fixed today. Head there," Fire told him. He turned to Hazelstar, waiting for her to explain.

"I found them easily. I nearly killed Bone, though Bloodfur stopped me. Keep an eye on him. His daughters seem to be loyal enough. How did the building go?"

"Fine. We finished one, and we're nearly done with the second. How is Crystal?"

"How should I know? She ran off," Hazelstar growled. "I want you to distance yourself from that she-cat, Fire."

"What? Why?"

"You need to focus on your duties to MoonClan, not a young she-cat," she told him.

"That isn't fair," he argued.

Hazelstar slashed his leg, and he cried out in pain. "Focus on your job, Fire!"

"Y-Yes, Hazelstar," he said, retreating to the clan.

Hazelstar groaned, heading into her den. She only hoped she wouldn't have to kill off any members before the battle.

Chapter 6

Hazelstar lazily opened her eyes to find sunlight peeking through the den. She slowly rose to her feet and let out a slow yawn. Padding outside, she already found Fire organizing patrols.

Good, she thought, glad his mind was off Crystal. The she-cat had two days now to return with thirty rogues. If not, Hazelstar would be sure to kill the she-cat off, whether Fire liked it or not.

"Hazelstar," Fire said, greeting the she-cat. "I have sent a few cats on patrol while others gather food and supplies for building the den."

"Very good," Hazelstar told him. "Any word from the others about members?"

Fire shook his head, then paused. "I had forgotten to tell you. We found a tom wondering through the woods alone last night. Bone and Snowflake captured him. He's in the den over there," he said, pointing to a small den guarded by Bone and Cliff.

"Thank you for the information. Perhaps it would be better to tell me a bit earlier next time, Fire?"

"I did not wish to disturb your slumber," Fire said, bowing slightly.

Ignoring the tom, Hazelstar padded off to the den, watching fear flicker in both Bone and Cliff's eyes as she passed by.

"Hazelstar," Cliff murmured. "We have caught a rogue."

"A very strong and fit one too," Bone told her.

"And you two found him?"

Bone shook his head. "My daughter, Snowflake, caught him in the woods. She didn't attack the tom though. I found her

speaking to him, so I knocked the tom unconscious and brought him here."

"Very good. I will have a word with Snowflake."

"We weren't sure what you wanted to do with the tom," Cliff told her. "So we kept him guarded in here."

"Thank you for not disposing of him immediately," Hazelstar said, padding through the den. Inside the den sat a young tom with broad shoulder and powerful muscles. He was a gray tabby tom, spots of dried blood coating his pelt from where he had been attacked. As Hazelstar entered, he turned, and Hazelstar gasped as she saw his bloodshot amber eyes.

"Are you the leader they speak of?"

"Yes," Hazelstar growled. "It was generous of my warriors to bring you here instead of killing you in the woods."

"So the rumors are true then? You clan cats are vicious and cruel like they say," the tom spat.

"No, not all of them!" she spat. "If you haven't noticed already, many of these cats are like you-rogues. This isn't a, well, normal clan. In fact, it is more of a clan to seek vengeance for something that happened long ago. Tell me, tom. What is your name?"

"Shard," he growled. "And who might you be?"

"Hazelstar, the leader of this clan."

"Will you be sending me out in the woods then?" he asked.

"No!" Hazelstar hissed. "It must've been pure luck you stumbled into our territory. But no, I won't set you free. I can either kill you right here in this den, or you can join this clan, MoonClan, and help us take the lands we seek. Living as a MoonClan cat would be wonderful, Shard. Imagine piles of prey, more than you could eat. We'd be superior to any cat in the forest!"

Sharp eyed her. Just from the look of him, she knew he was clever, and she watched as the corners of his lip curled into a smile.

"Very well. I'll join your clan. On one condition," he grinned.

"And what would that be?"

"You take me out of this den and let me stay with the other warriors," he growled.

"Very well, Shard, but if you dare try to escape this camp, not just myself but the entire clan will come after you, and we *will* kill you."

"I understand," he said. "You don't happen to have a medicine cat, do you? I find my wounds are a bit painful."

"Only time will let them heal. Once we find a medicine cat, you may be tended to. Now go on," she said, shooing him out of the den. As she came out, Bone eyed her.

"The tom seems trustworthy enough," she told him. "Go to Fire and do what he says," she told the toms. They padded off, leaving Hazelstar to find Snowflake.

She headed to the dens under construction, finding the she-cat working with her mother.

"Snowflake!" Hazelstar hissed.

The she-cat jumped at her yowl, and she turned, nervously facing her leader. "Wh-what is it, Hazelstar?"

"Might I have a word?"

The she-cat gulped and looked at her mother before turning away to follow Hazelstar. Hazelstar led the young she-cat to her den.

"Sit down," Hazelstar instructed.

Without a word, Snowflake sat, her blue eyes gazing at Hazelstar.

"I was told you found Shard in our territory," Hazelstar spoke, pacing around the den.

"That is correct, Hazelstar."

"Bone told me of some interesting sorts, Snowflake. I have been told you were chatting with the tom, being friendly, rather than *defending our territory*!" she spat in front of the she-cat.

"But, Hazelstar," Snowflake began.

"Enough!" Hazelstar spat, shoving the she-cat against the den. "You are lucky enough I let your father rejoin. I should've known his daughters would act the same as him. You even look like him," she spat, her claws placed firmly on Snowflake's shoulders. Blood had begun to ooze from them, and Snowflake let out a screech.

"Please, Hazelstar, let me go!"

"Why did you not attack?! Are you too much of a kittypet?!"

"Kittypet?! Never!" Snowflake spat. "He didn't seem like a threat, Hazelstar! He...He was the most beautiful tom I've ever seen. I couldn't kill him. Haven't you ever been in love?"

At the mention of the word "love", Hazelstar sunk her claws further into Snowflake's shoulder. "One does not need love to survive in the world!" she spat. "All they need is their rage to get what they want!"

She remembered sitting near the camp during the cold nights in FoxClan, watching as Chesnuttail and Hollybreeze mingled. She remembered watching Chesnuttail and Cloverpelt sitting in the moonlight, whispering soft words to each other. Had they not known how much it had hurt to see them happy while her heart was being torn apart between her claws?

"Hazelstar! Please!" Snowflake begged. Blood began to stain

her white pelt now, and Hazelstar could sense she was growing weak.

"Why not just kill you here?! You don't need love to survive in this clan! All love was sucked out of these cats many moons ago!" she spat.

"Hazelstar, *please*," Snowflake cried, wailing.

Hazelstar held up a claw, ready to kill the she-cat, when a body slammed into hers, throwing her across the den. Hazelstar hit the side with a boom, getting up slowly. She could not believe what had just happened. She, Hazelstar, had been attacked!

She looked, seeing Shard standing over the injured Snowflake.

"Shard! I should've known you were a traitor!" she spat.

"I'm not a traitor!" he spat at her. "And neither is Snowflake," he told her. "I wish to serve MoonClan just as any other cat, but you can't go killing this she-cat just for chatting. If she had attacked me, I would've run off, tried to kill her. But her words made me stay, and then Bone brought me here. You should be thanking the she-cat for finding me."

"It'd be better if I slit both your throats," she growled, taking a step forward. Shard continued to stand firmly in front of Snowflake.

"You'll be losing two warriors," he growled.

Hazelstar raised her claw, but she could not find herself to kill the two. Slowly, she lowered it, then spat. "Fine, you may both stay! But consider this a warning! You take Snowflake out of here, Shard!"

"Very well," he said, slowly helping Snowflake up. She leaned against him as they exited, leaving Hazelstar alone in her den.

Furious, she scraped the walls of the den with her claws in

anger. Why had she been so merciful?! Why couldn't she be like her mother?! Most of all, why had her mother chosen her to lead?!

Chapter 7

Hazelstar awoke, three days passed since Crystal's journey. She stood up, speaking to herself. "You'll return today, pretty she-cat, with an army," she growled.

She padded outside, finding Shard sitting next to Snowflake. The two laughed, nuzzling each other. Hazelstar wanted to gag. Their wounds had not healed much, but they still continued to work well.

"Hey, lovebirds!" she spat.

Shard lifted his head.

"Get to work!" she spat. Snowflake and Shard got up, heading over to Fire to get assigned to do something. The camp was almost complete, and soon, they'd have a nice refugee camp for those rogues who were not quite members, but would still fight for MoonClan.

"Fire," Hazelstar spoke.

The ginger tom turned, padding over to his leader. "What is it, Hazelstar?"

"Has there been any news of Crystal?"

Fire shook his head. "I wish."

"That she-cat has got until sundown before I go after her and kill her," Hazelstar growled, continuing to pad away.

"Hazelstar, wait!" Fire exclaimed.

"What?!"

"Maybe it'd be best to give Crystal a bit more time. She is traveling a long way after all to get members for *your* clan," Fire

explained.

Hazelstar immediately streaked her claws against his cheek. "Is this how you speak to your leader?! It is *our* clan, not *my* clan. I have given Crystal three days, and that is final. She did not seem to act like three days was too little time."

"But what if she's running late because the cats won't cooperate?"

"That's her problem," Hazelstar growled. "I have given her plenty of time already. Do not make me wish I hadn't appointed you deputy," Hazelstar said, tracing a claw against Fire's cheek. "Because if I do—,"

She was cut off by a cry from Cliff.

"What now?!" Hazelstar growled.

The tom was cut up, bloody scratches covering his body. "There's a wild she-cat in the woods, Hazelstar! She attacked me the first moment she laid eyes on me."

"Wild she-cat?" Hazelstar pondered for a moment. "Show me, Cliff."

"She's dangerous, Hazelstar. I couldn't risk your life," he explained.

"It'll be fine. Now show me where the 'wild she-cat' is, Cliff," she said.

He nodded nervously, padding into the woods. He walked slowly, gazing around quickly around the woods like a coward. Even at the slightest movement, he jumped.

"Get yourself together, rogue!" Hazelstar yowled. "A MoonClan cat has no fear."

"What about now?" Cliff asked shakily. He pointed his shaky tail to a thin and lean she-cat stand on a rock. She was tall with dark brown fur and amber eyes. Immediately, Hazelstar recognized

her.

"Screechshade?"

The she-cat sheathed her claws, then smiled. "Hazelnose, is that you?"

"Wait, you two know each other?" Cliff asked.

"Is this the she-cat?" Hazelstar asked.

Cliff nodded. "Yes! She attacked me for no reason."

"Sorry, I didn't know that you were a part of MoonClan," Screechshade said, licking her paw.

"It's great to see you, Screechshade. It's Hazel*star* now, by the way. Moonstar has appointed me leader and Fire as deputy. What have you been up to?"

"Congratulations," Screechshade said, leaping down from the rock. "What an honor. I would never have thought that scrawny ginger tom would become deputy, but no matter. I have been wandering around these woods for moons."

"You're here to join MoonClan, I presume?"

"I am here to *return* to MoonClan," Screechshade purred. "Tell me, is my sister here?"

"Bloodfur has already arrived," Hazelstar explained. "She and Bone have had four daughters."

"So she's become mates with that coward. Can't blame her. My sister isn't as vicious. I seemed to do the dirty work for Moonstar anyway."

"You did dirty work for Moonstar?"

"Oh yeah," Screechshade said. "There were several cats she instructed me to kill, including Bone's formal mate, Snowfeather."

The name sounded familiar in the back of Hazelstar's head, but she wasn't sure why. She barely remembered the she-cat. What had she looked like again? Suddenly, Hazelstar froze as it all came back to her. It was Snowfeather who watched over her and her siblings in the nursery, it was Snowfeather who helped her escape with Blackpaw to FoxClan. She had not known why the she-cat had been murdered.

"Why was the she-cat killed exactly?" Hazelstar asked weakly.

"After she helped Blackpaw, Chesnutkit, and you, of all cats, escape. I'm surprised Moonstar made you leader. You didn't believe in MoonClan's power as a kit."

"I've changed now," Hazelstar growled. "You need to speak to your leader with reverence." She couldn't help but think about Snowfeather's act of kindness that had cost her life. Was she betraying that now?

"Let's be honest, Hazelstar. You're nowhere near as vicious as Moonstar. I suppose you haven't even killed a cat yet," she purred.

"Don't question my powers!" Hazelstar spat.

"It's true, isn't it?" Screechshade laughed. "You haven't killed a cat. My, I don't understand why you were chosen. Too cowardly to kill a cat? Why not kill this one?" she asked, pointing to Cliff.

"Cliff is a clan member. I cannot go around killing members!" Hazelstar hissed.

"We have plenty already. It won't hurt," Screechshade said.

Cliff froze in fear. Hazelstar could do it. She could kill the tom to prove Screechshade wrong. She took a step forward, then stopped.

"Not Cliff," she spat. "I'll kill any rogue you want."

"But that doesn't take commitment, now does it? A true

leader can kill even their family. I'm sure you know who that is."

"You want me to kill my brother?!" Hazelstar exclaimed.

"To be fair, you have two brothers. I haven't heard from Tigerstripe since he left with that black she-cat, Jetfur. But I'm sure Chesnuttail would be an easy kill."

"Chesnuttail is already dead," Hazelstar hissed. "I swear he died in battle."

"I wouldn't be sure of that. I saw him on FoxClan territory today. It took me all my might not to kill the tom."

"You saw my brother?" Hazelstar asked. She froze, wondering if she should ask Screechshade if she saw her son. She opened her mouth, then closed it. No one knew about Hazelstar's son, no cat. She couldn't blow the secret now.

"Why are you even here if you're just going to criticize me?" Hazelstar asked. "Respect me!" she hissed, slamming the she-cat to the ground.

Screechshade slowly stood up. "See, you're becoming a better leader already. Say, is Tooth here?"

"Tooth?" Hazelstar asked. She froze, then remembered they had been mates before Screechshade had left him, ashamed to have taken him from Leopardtail, Hazelstar's sister.

"He's dead," Hazelstar said.

"What a shame," Screechshade said. "Well, it's probably best if we head back now."

Hazelstar nodded, walking with Screechshade. Cliff slowly followed behind in fear. Hazelstar knew he was scared of the she-cat. Any cat would be. Everyone knew very well that Screechshade was one of the toughest cats of MoonClan.

As they arrived back into the clan, cats fell silent. "Screechshade" was whispered among the cats.

"Did you miss me?" she purred. Hazelstar watched as Screechshade turned to Bloodfur. "Sister, it's been so long. Are these your kits?" she asked, pointing to the four young warriors beside her.

"Yes," Bloodfur growled.

"And Bone is the father, I see," Screechshade said. "Hello there, Bone."

Bone let out a growl. "Hello, Screechshade. Nice to see you."

"And Ice!" Screechshade turned, facing the white she-cat.

"You broke my brother's heart," Ice growled. "He gave up everything for you!"

"Well, I've been told he's dead, so what good does it do now?" Screechshade asked. "If you excuse me, I'll be heading to my den."

As she exited, cats stared at Hazelstar. "I know what you're thinking," Hazelstar spat, knowing they were getting ready to complain. "Screechshade is a valuable MoonClan member. Treat her with respect!"

Cats slowly padded off, and Fire turned to Hazelstar. "Are you sure about this, Hazelstar?"

"Yes," Hazelstar spoke. "Any news on Crystal?"

"None," Fire sighed.

"Better start sharpening my claws," Hazelstar said, padding off. She watched as Fire stood in awe behind her.

The sun soon began to set, and Hazelstar sat near the edge of the camp. She didn't want to go after Crystal, but soon, she'd have no choice. The sun was almost set, and by the time it set, it meant that Crystal's time was over, it meant her life was over.

As the sun began to set more, Hazelstar heard a rustle of

leaves, and she turned, seeing Crystal leading an army of rogues.

"CRYSTAL!" Fire exclaimed, running to the she-cat.

Hazelstar rolled her eyes, marching to the she-cat. "You're lucky, she-cat. I was just about to go after you to kill you."

Crystal gulped. "I have brought the cats like you asked, Hazelstar. Where will they stay?"

"Follow me," Hazelstar said, leading her through some trees. A vast clearing sat behind them.

"This will be their camp," Hazelstar told Crystal. "There should be prey and water here. We'll supply some too."

"INTO THE CLEARING!" shouted Crystal. The cats padded into the clearing. Among them Hazelstar saw cats apprentice age and kit age. There were a few old cats there too.

"PLEASE DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO HAZELSTAR!"

Hazelstar grinned, standing up on a nearby log. "Thank you for joining us, rogues. Believe me, you are helping a great cause. In a few moons, we shall attack the cats who have betrayed us!" Yowls of approval rang through the air.

"For the time being, you shall stay here. The clearing isn't crowded right now, but soon more cats will join. We'll supply you food and water, but that's it. Do not step near the MoonClan camp unless you're under attack. We'll have guards placed near your clearing to make sure you don't escape. In the meantime, it would be wise to practice battle practice. If you do not, your life will be at stake. Thank you, and good night," Hazelstar said, leaping down from the log.

She pushed past Crystal and Fire back to the camp. Maybe this would work.

Chapter 8

A few days had passed since Screechshade's arrival, as well as the arrival of the rogues. MoonClan had been thriving since then. The camp was nearly rebuilt, and everything seemed to be going smoothly.

Hazelstar awoke, finding Fire outside of her den.

"What is it now?" she grumbled.

"I only meant to ask if everyone has arrived," Fire spoke.

Hazelstar thought for a moment. It seemed as if the entire clan were here. Something felt missing though. "I'm afraid not, Fire," she spoke at last. "My brother, Tigerstripe, is nowhere to be found, and Tooth's son, Fang, has not arrived."

"Maybe we should patrol through the forest then?" Fire suggested.

"I can patrol. You are much too busy to be patrolling," Hazelstar told him. "Send Ice with me."

Fire froze. "Very well, Hazelstar," he said, running off.

Hazelstar yawned, heading towards the center of the camp. Green-leaf was still going strong, but she knew leaf-fall would be approaching soon, and she knew she had to complete her plan by then.

"Hazelstar, you want to patrol with me?" Ice's voice interfered with Hazelstar's thoughts. She turned, looking at the white she-cat, and nodded.

"Let's go," Hazelstar said, beginning to exit the camp. Ice remained silent until they passed the group of rogues.

"Why are we out here, exactly?" Ice asked.

"To look for the remaining members. Tooth's son, Fang, is one of them, as well as my brother and that she-cat, Jetfur," Hazelstar explained.

"Perhaps it would be best to wait," Ice suggested.

Hazelstar hissed at the she-cat. "Waiting is not an option! We must attack as soon as possible!" she growled.

"But what if they don't wish to come," Ice told her.

Hazelstar froze. That could be the case. "Then, Moonstar will deal with them. We'll send cats out to find them somehow or other."

"Whatever you say, Hazelstar," Ice sighed.

Hazelstar continued walking, not speaking to Ice. She never liked the she-cat, and she had believed she was too soft, unlike her brother, Tooth. Perhaps she was just like her mother, Snowfeather.

Snowfeather. Hazelstar could not forget the she-cat who had helped her escape. She felt as if she was betraying the she-cat.

"Do you remember your mother, Ice?" Hazelstar asked.

Ice hesitated, then nodded. "Yes, I remember what Moonstar did to her. Why do you ask?"

Hazelstar shrugged, unsure why she was asking about the she-cat. "Do you think I am a good leader, Ice?"

"Of course," Ice told her.

"Screechshade said I'm a coward for not killing a cat yet. To be honest, I'm not sure why my mother even chose me for this mission. I'm a failure."

"No, you're not," Ice reassured her. "You've rebuilt this clan. We're seeking revenge."

That's not all you know, Hazelstar thought. She sighed, continuing to walk through the forest. Maybe this whole patrol was worthless.

"Well this is a touching scene," a voice came.

Hazelstar froze. "Who's there?!" she spat. "Show yourself or I swear, I'll rip your throat out."

"I highly doubt that," the voice came again. Hazelstar turned around, unsure where it was coming from.

Suddenly, bushes began to rattle, and a young white tom padded out of the bushes. Immediately, Hazelstar recognized him- Fang. He looked just like his father, Tooth.

"Hazelnose, good to see you. Didn't think I would," he murmured.

"Fang, you're alive!" Ice exclaimed.

"I don't seem to recall you," Fang said, backing away from Ice. "You look familiar though."

"I'm your father's sister, Ice. Surely he's mentioned me."

Fang shrugged. "All he mentioned to me while raising me was a cat named Screechshade. I know Leopardtail is my mother, so I'm not sure where she comes in."

"First off," Hazelstar began. "I'm Hazel*star*, now, and my sister, your mother, was going to raise you and your brother before perishing in the battle. Your father had left her for Screechshade, only to be rejected himself."

"And how is it you know all of this?" Fang asked.

"I get around," Hazelstar spoke. "Your father is dead, correct?"

Fang nodded. "He was keeping a she-cat prisoner, as well as her kit. I guess they fell in love one day. I sometimes visited my

father, every moon or so, only for a couple of days. I heard a fire was spreading, and when I went to the den, it had collapsed, and my father was gone, as well as the she-cat. I'm sure the kit perished too. That's my father's price for turning to the good side."

"Indeed," Hazelstar murmured. "You're here to join MoonClan, correct?"

"Yes," Fang told her.

"Follow us then," Ice instructed.

Hazelstar began to pad back with the two. She was a bit disappointed she could not find her brother and Jetfur, but it didn't matter. She'd find them soon enough.

"Your brother is in FoxClan, correct?" Hazelstar asked Fang.

"Yes," Fang told her. "He's a wimp, isn't he? I hear he went with Fire's brother. Speaking of which, is Fire there?"

"Fire is deputy," Ice explained. "You'll be seeing familiar faces, Fang."

"I barely remember any faces at all," Fang admitted, padding into camp with the two. Cats passed by with prey, some practicing fighting.

Fang looked around excitedly, and Hazelstar couldn't help but smile a little. Maybe he was glad to be back in his old clan.

Suddenly, Fang froze, his eyes fixed on someone. "Who's she?" he asked.

Hazelstar looked, noticing he was staring in awe at Screechshade. "That's Screechshade," Hazelstar explained. "Your father's old mate. Don't mess with that she-cat, Fang. Your pelt will be ripped off by the end of the day."

"She's really pretty," Fang said.

Hazelstar swiped the tom in the head. "Hey, kind of

preparing for battle here! Go talk to your grandfather or something. I don't care. Now shoo," she said, shooing the tom off.

Hazelstar waved good-bye to Ice then headed to her den. All she needed was a nap to cool off and relax.

She layed down in her nest, resting her head on her paws. Slowly, she fell asleep.

"Hazelstar," the voice came. "Hazelstar," it came again.

Hazelstar opened her eyes to find her mother staring over at her. Hazelstar immediately leapt up.

"Mother, you scared me," Hazelstar admitted.

"Good," her mother laughed. Hazelstar shivered at her regular malicious laugh. Was there ever a time when she wasn't scared of her mother?

"Why have you brought me here?" Hazelstar asked, looking around the Dark Forest.

"I've come to congratulate you on bringing the members back," Moonstar told her.

"But, Mother, I haven't brought them all back. Tigerstripe and Jetfur are still out there," Hazelstar explained.

Moonstar growled. "That is because your brother is a wimp," she spat. "He's gone over to the good side, as has Jetfur. They refuse to come to camp. It'll be your job to retrieve them. Take them prisoner with the others."

Hazelstar was surprised at this. Her brother, Tigerstripe, the fearless tom of the clan had turned into a coward?

"I will, Mother."

"Good," Moonstar told her. "It would be wise to attack FoxClan soon. Cats will begin to get suspicious, and soon, security measures will go up. Attack soon, and your message will spread

throughout the forest-MoonClan is alive."

"Yes, Mother, I will," Hazelstar told her.

"Good, now go!" Moonstar commanded. Everything began to fade, and Hazelstar couldn't help but shiver as Moonstar's eyes flashed a bright red.

Chapter 9

Another few sunrises had come and gone, and so far, MoonClan had been going smoothly. The rogues had been doing well, as well as the members, and Hazelstar knew it was only a matter of time before they went and captured the FoxClan cats. Doing so would take a fair amount of cats though.

Hazelstar opened her eyes and rose to her feet, padding outside of the den. Cats padded by, performing their duties.

"You there!" Hazelstar hissed at Bloodfur.

Bloodfur froze. "What is it, Hazelstar?"

"Go take some prey to the rogues, and take your sister with you. I'm afraid they're running out," she told her.

"Yes, Hazelstar," Bloodfur said, bowing to her.

Hazelstar had to admit, it was a bit odd, but she seemed to like the idea of being in power. She knew for certain that her mother was especially skilled at it though.

Hazelstar watched Bloodfur go off, only to be stopped in her tracks by Fire.

"Have you heard the news, Hazelstar?"

Hazelstar rolled her eyes. "Let me guess, you and Crystal are mates," she growled.

"Well, yes," Fire told her.

Hazelstar began to walk away, uninterested in the tom's problems.

"But that's not all!" he argued. "We have more rogues

coming!"

Hazelstar froze, turning around. "More rogues coming, you say? How did you ever sort that out, Fire?"

"It was actually Crystal," he explained. "I mean, I helped and all. She passed the word around to other cats as she went by, and the other day, we found the leader of a rogue pack who was willing to join. He's bringing nearly fifty cats!"

"Fifty?" Hazelstar thought, pausing. She then purred. "Perfect," she said. "Very good, Fire. Congratulate Crystal for me, will you? I hate speaking to that she-cat."

"Yes, of course, Hazelstar," Fire spoke, running off.

Fifty members. My, wouldn't it be grand to have fifty extra members in MoonClan. Maybe Hazelstar had not lost hope. Perhaps, MoonClan could win this battle. Maybe the forest would be theirs!

Excitement filled Hazelstar, causing her paws to tingle. Surely they would be able to capture the rest of the cats in no time. Oh, the plan was going smoothly. It was definitely going smoothly.

She raced to her den, curling up in her nest. Secretly, she wished Moonstar would visit her to congratulate her. All Hazelstar really wanted was for her mother to be proud of her. That's what every cat wanted, right?

She closed her eyes, her thoughts drifting away. Slowly, she fell asleep.

"Hazelstar," Moonstar's yowl caused her to open her eyes. She shuddered, looking around at the thick swamp and dark trees. She was again in the Dark Forest.

"Mother, how are you?" Hazelstar asked.

"I only am here to give you advice," Moonstar growled. She didn't seem at all happy with Hazelstar.

"Did I do something wrong?"

"Did you do something wrong?" Moonstar repeated, pacing around. Hazelstar shuddered as she watched her unsheathe her claws. "Now, why would you ever think that?"

"You don't seem very happy with me," Hazelstar told her.

"Darling, I never said I was upset. I am here to give you advice, correct?"

"Correct," Hazelstar spoke.

"Then heed it!" she hissed.

Hazelstar jumped, then nodded. "What am I doing wrong? Or, I mean, I only ask for your criticism to make MoonClan better."

"You heard fifty rogues were arriving today, yes?"

"Yes," Hazelstar replied, not sure where Moonstar was going with this.

"And how many cats would that make in the clan?" she asked.

Hazelstar pondered for a moment. "I suppose about seventy cats, maybe eighty. Isn't that enough?"

"I only ask you to think for a moment here," Moonstar told her. "How many cats live in SnowClan?"

"Eighty, ninety, maybe," Hazelstar thought, shrinking down as Moonstar came closer to her.

"And how many in FoxClan?" she asked.

"Thirty, forty," she whimpered.

"Think about the other clans that live in the woods, Hazelstar. Don't you think they'll be joining in the battle as well?"

"But on which side?" Hazelstar asked. Obviously, her comment was stupid, because she received a scratch in the face

from her mother.

"It is obvious which side, daughter! They'll be protecting the forest that we so desperately want."

"But do we really need the forest, Mother? All I'm doing is seeking revenge for you. To be honest, I don't really know why you want to kill all these cats," Hazelstar argued. As soon as she finished saying the words, she knew she should've taken them back.

With a swift move, Moonstar had Hazelstar pinned. She squirmed under her mother's grip, but all Moonstar did was laugh.

"Why, you ungrateful, selfish daughter!" she spat. "I've worked my whole life protecting you, teaching you only what I know best, and you repay me by going against my methods?"

"No, not at all!" Hazelstar argued.

"I already know you're lying, Hazel*nose*," she growled, tracing a claw over her daughter's throat. "I would kill you now, but why not wait. We'll see how you do in battle," she laughed. "And if you must know, Hazel*nose*, there are cats in these woods who do not allow the freedom of others. Every cat is evil, and they will judge you, and despise you. These woods belong to MoonClan. SnowClan, FoxClan, and all the other clans must perish," Moonstar hissed. "Do you understand that?"

Hazelstar gulped. "Yes, Mother. I desperately want to get rid of the clans too."

"Now, you see what I mean. This clan will celebrate victory. We can forget all those old methods with StarClan. No, you see, with the Dark Forest on our side, we can be the most powerful cats in the forest!"

"I see, Mother. I apologize for lashing out," Hazelstar told her.

"That's a good daughter. It's a shame, really. I had hoped for better. Tigerstripe turned good, Leopardtail died, Chesnuttail never had evil, but you, maybe you can bring us to victory."

Hazelstar felt evil surge in her, evil she had never felt before. These cats, these small cats, had looked at her in fear. They had looked at her as if she were superior to them. But it was true, wasn't it? And then Hazelnstar gulped, her eyes flashing a very faint blood red.

"You have the Dark Forest in you," Moonstar whispered. "Let it come through you."

Hazelstar closed her eyes, allowing evil to flow through her veins. She gasped, opening her eyes. She unsheathed her claws, then nodded. "I will let it come to me, Mother. Now, what do you want with the rogues?"

"Gather as many as you can."

"Shouldn't we only gather as much as the other army?"

"Your goal is not to defeat them, but to decimate them!" Moonstar hissed. "Rip them to pieces...literally."

"I will, Mother. And I'll get more rogues."

"Good. Remember your mother's teachings, and everything will go smoothly," she purred.

Yes, because I should follow you who got killed by a measly apprentice, she thought. She hoped her mother couldn't read her thoughts.

Everything began to fade, and Hazelstar shut her eyes, not wanting to see her mother's blood red eyes flash again. She wanted to see her mother's bright green eyes, like she used to see. Now she only saw red and evil.

Upon awaking, Hazelstar was immediately told to go talk to Snowflake who had some important business to discuss with her.

Hazelstar nodded, finding the she-cat near the warriors den.

"Hazelstar, I didn't mean to wake you," Snowflake told her.

"It's fine. I was awake anyway," she said. "What is it you need to talk to me about?"

"I'm expecting Shard's kits. Isn't that great?!" she exclaimed.

Hazelstar thought back to when she had not wanted to fight to protect her kits, and her mother had told her to never return. Hazelstar had come back for the battle though to fight with MoonClan, only to watch her mate die.

Be like Moonstar, Hazelstar told herself.

"Very well. Yes, MoonClan could strive with new kits. However, I must tell you that you must stick with your warrior duties until you are incapable."

"How soon would that be?" Snowflake asked.

"A day or two before delivery. Your kits will become apprentices at three moons."

"Three moons?! Isn't that a bit early?"

"Do not question the ancient MoonClan law!" Hazelstar spat. Ancient, it probably wasn't. MoonClan was really only about three, four generations old, Hazelstar being the second generation of MoonClan cats.

"Very well, Hazelstar. If they must fight at three moons, they will," Snowflake told her.

Hazelstar sighed in relief, padding back to her den. Her evil had to improve somehow.

Chapter 10

"Go order the patrols and bring more water to the rogues!" Hazelstar yowled at Fire. The tom nodded, quickly running off.

It had been a few days since Moonstar's visit to Hazelstar, and she still had nightmares about it. She had always been terrified of her mother though, and she wondered what would happen if she ever stood up to her.

Mothers were supposed to be kind and gentle, but not Moonstar. At a young age she and Chesnuttail had been taught to fight and upon escaping, Hazelstar thought she was free. She supposed it was her fault she got tangled into MoonClan business though after her exile from FoxClan.

Hazelstar gazed around the camp watching Fang flirt with Screechshade. It was disgusting to look at, and Hazelstar turned away. She tried not to think of her deceased mate, Rockclaw, and her son, Treekit. Though she supposed he had a new warrior name by now.

She knew that in only a few weeks they would be raiding the FoxClan camp and kidnapping her kin. She couldn't wait to see the terrified faces of her kin...but what if they weren't terrified.

"No, they will be," she growled. She would be as cruel as Moonstar. She had to be.

She decided to walk to the rogue camp. They all sat, chatting with each other. Some kits played around, some scurried up trees while others battled for fun. How could they enjoy life in this clearing? It had to be miserable for them.

At the sight of Hazelstar, everyone fell silent. She slowly climbed up on a fallen tree, looking out at the members.

"Greetings, rogues," she announced. "It's good to see all of

you. Has my deputy brought you water?"

There were small nods, and she nodded too, glad he had done his job well.

"Very good. Now, unfortunately, you're going to have to squeeze in more. We're still in need of many rogues. Does any cat know of other rogue groups around?"

There was a pause, and then a few cats stepped forward. One was a brown tabby tom with a long scar down his eye. Another was a gray tabby she-cat with bright yellow eyes. The last was a smaller black tom with white socks.

"Good, good," she purred. "You there, go first!" she growled at the brown tabby.

"There was a rivalry rogue group that ours would sometimes meet," the brown tabby explained. "They were located only a short distance from us."

"Which rogue group are you from again?"

"The one which that cat Crystal belonged to," he explained.

"Crystal seems to work miraculous ways with the rogues," Hazelstar said to herself. "How many are in this rogue group?"

"Thirty, maybe forty," the cat explained.

"Perfect. Fire!" she hissed.

Hearing her cry, the tom rushed towards her. "Yes, Hazelstar?"

"We need to set up another search for rogues. Get Crystal and—"

"No," Fire immediately said.

"What did you just say?" Hazelstar growled, unsheathing her claws. "You will show respect to your leader!"

Fire backed away slowly. "I-I mean, Crystal's been on so many trips already. Why not send another cat? These cats can do well," he suggested.

"I do not trust these cats," she whispered.

"Then send another member with them. I can go get them for you if you wish," Fire suggested.

Hazelstar thought for a moment. "I suppose we could send other members. Go get your mother and Bone. They can go with these cats," she whispered.

The rogues chatted as Hazelstar sat on the tree, waiting for Fire's return. He quickly returned with his mother and grandfather.

"What is all of this nonsense, Hazelstar?" Bone asked.

"It is not nonsense!" she spat. "This tom here knows of another thirty or forty rogues. What is your name?" she asked the tabby.

"Sharp," he growled.

"Sharp here knows of another group. Sharp, I was wondering if you, along with one or two others of your choice, could go with my loyal clanmates here and make these rogues join."

"I'd be honored," Sharp told her. "Gill! Claws!" he spat. Two large toms padded forward next to him.

"You've got three days," she told him. "Ice! Bone! Make sure they behave, and we'll see you soon!"

"But, don't we have duties?" Ice asked.

"Other cats can fill in your duties," Hazelstar explained. "NOW GO!"

Ice nodded quickly, following Bone and the other three toms into the woods. All that was left was the gray tabby she-cat and the black tom.

"She-cat, speak," Hazelstar instructed.

"Yes, Hazelstar," the gray tabby said, stepping forward. "I come from another rogue group that was brought here only a few days ago. My brother is the leader of a powerful group. I'm sure he could bring one hundred cats here."

"One hundred?!" Hazelstar exclaimed. It was a lot, and they'd surely beat all the cats. "Fire, I need you to go get Peach and Cliff. They can escort this she-cat."

Fire nodded, running off again. The ginger she-cat and brown tom raced into the clearing.

"We are eager to serve you," Peach said, bowing to her leader.

"Good, good," Hazelstar purred. "Peach and Cliff, you'll be escorting this she-cat to her brother's rogue group. She-cat, pick five others to go with you."

There was a pause, and soon, the gray tabby had five other companions with her.

"You have seven sunrises," Hazelstar explained.

"We will get on our way," Cliff told her. The cats rushed off quickly, leaving only the black tom with white socks.

"Hazelstar, I don't have as many cats as the others, but I can bring twenty rogues nearby to this camp," he spoke nervously.

"As long as we have members that will be fine. Fire, this time I need you to grab Raven and Shard. And if Snowflake complains, give her a swat to the head. That she-cat gets on my nerves," she growled.

"Yes, Hazelstar," Fire said, racing off once again.

"Will I get as many days at the others?" the black tom asked.

"With only twenty, I will give you a day," she explained.

"A day?!" the tom exclaimed.

"You did not offer me enough for me to be more generous. Be gracious or I'll cut it down to half a day," she growled.

"Yes, Hazelstar," the tom stammered.

Fire rushed back, Shard lazily following behind him while Raven quickly padded by.

"Snowflake cause any trouble?" Hazelstar asked.

Fire raised up his claw to show blood dripping from it. "A little, but I took care of it."

"Don't you lay a claw on Snowflake before I return," Shard hissed at Hazelstar.

"As long as she behaves she'll do fine. You better hope she does too. Wouldn't want her getting injured with her kits and all."

Shard let out a fierce growl, but he didn't lash at Hazelstar.

"As for you, tom," Hazelstar said, looking at the black tom, "I am not allowing you to bring anyone. Now go!" Hazelstar commanded.

Raven rushed off with the tom while Shard looked back at Hazelstar one last time before racing off with the others.

"Come on, back to camp," Hazelstar told Fire. Together, the two padded back to camp, finding the other cats busy doing chores.

"Hazelstar!" came a familiar cry.

She turned, spotting Fang running up to her. "Screechshade and I are hunting."

"Very well. Bring back lots of prey," she told them.

She knew very well Fang was only hunting with the she-cat to get to know her better. Once they disappeared out of camp, she

slid into the woods, climbing up a nearby tree. She followed them by leaping to each tree. Thank goodness she had her mother's light feet.

The two did seem to be hunting, and they did catch prey, but after awhile, the two sat down as the sun began to set. Hazelstar found a nice spot on a branch and watched the two. She knew her mother had been into the drama in her clan, and Hazelstar knew that she had to know what was going on with her clanmates as well.

"Lovely night," Fang purred.

"Indeed," Screechshade spoke.

"I-I enjoyed hunting with you," Fang told her.

Screechshade laughed. "As did I."

Why was Screechshade not ripping the tom's head off?

"You don't act as tough as everyone says," Fang told her.

"Well, there are certain cats I don't need to act tough for. Sometimes I don't want to scare off cats," she told him.

"Oh," Fang said, turning away.

"When I first saw you, you looked just like your father. I had never been so thrilled to see anyone before," she purred.

"Oh," Fang laughed. "Wow, uh."

Hazelstar rolled her eyes. This had to be the most cheesiest thing she had ever seen.

"Well," Fang said, gulping, "When I first saw you, I thought you were the most beautiful cat I had ever seen."

"Really?" Screechshade asked.

"Really," Fang purred, scooching closer to her.

"The truth is, I think I feel the same," she purred.

"Really?"

"I love you, Fang," Screechshade purred.

"I love you too," Fang replied, nuzzling the she-cat.

Hazelstar turned her back and gagged. These cats were supposed to be hunting not declaring love to each other. She couldn't just pop out now though. She slowly made her way down the tree, disappearing into the bushes.

Walking a bit away, she came out of the bushes, finding the two curled up next to each other.

"Hey, lovebirds!" she spat.

Immediately, Screechshade leapt up. "Hazelstar, we, uh, I didn't know you were here."

"I was just casually strolling through the woods," she told them, hoping they would buy it. "I assume you've caught prey."

"Yes, lots," Fang admitted.

"Very well. Get out of here and get that prey back to camp!" she growled.

"Yes, Hazelstar," Screechshade said, rushing off with Fang.

Hazelstar laughed as they went off. It was fun messing with her clanmates, she had to admit. A pang of sadness filled inside her though. She missed Rockclaw and her son, both of them gone.

"You'll see your son soon enough," she reminded herself. If only she could love her son like she wanted to. She knew she would have to act cruel to him, but it was Moonstar's orders after all. She just wished she could love someone again.

Chapter 11

As the sun rose above the horizon, it marked the seventh day since Hazelstar had sent all the cats out. The black tom had returned with seventeen rogues, Sharp had returned with fifty, and now, Hazelstar was waiting for the she-cat to return with one hundred rogues.

Hazelstar's body ached as she woke up. She had been teaching cats some battle training the other day, and she had pulled a few muscles in the process. She wasn't the slim she-cat her mother was.

"Hazelstar! Hazelstar!" Fire's frantic voice made her jump.

She quickly padded out of the den, facing her deputy.

"What is it?!" she spat.

"That she-cat you sent is returning with over a hundred rogues!"

"Over a hundred?!" Hazelstar exclaimed. "Marvelous! Lead them to the clearing!"

"Hazelstar, there might not be enough room in the clearing," Fire explained.

"There will be!" she yowled. "Go direct them! All of our rogues have arrived! I'll be there shortly."

Fire nodded, running off to greet the rogues. He left Hazelstar alone in the camp for a few moments to eat. She grabbed a fresh robin and bit into it, the warm taste filling her mouth. She quickly gobbled the rest up, her stomach now filled.

She marched over to the clearing, watching rogues mix in with the others. Fire was right. The clearing was a bit too small for all the rogues. The battle would be in a few more moons though.

They wouldn't have to wait too long.

"Hazelstar, I brought them over like you instructed," Fire said, facing his leader.

"Good, good," Hazelstar told Fire. She looked into his green eyes, then nodded. "You can go now, Fire. I'll take it from here."

"If you wish," Fire said, leaving the clearing.

The sound of chatter filled the clearing, and even as Hazelstar leapt onto the fallen tree, the cats continued to speak.

"ROGUES, LISTEN HERE!" she shouted.

All the cats fell silent, turning their attention to Hazelstar.

"Good," Hazelstar purred. "My name is Hazelstar, your new leader."

"But we are not clan cats!" a cat shouted.

"You must be new," Hazelstar laughed. "I do not know which cat said that, but I will tell you that if you speak over me again, it will be the last time you speak. Got it?"

Cats nodded slowly.

"A cat says I am not leader. You're right. I'm not. The Dark Forest is your leader, Moonstar is your leader! I am only here to guide the clan in an independent way. Still, you will treat me and all other MoonClan cats with respect!" she hissed.

"It has come to my attention that there are many in this clearing. MoonClan is a large camp, one that can hold many cats. However, none of you are MoonClan cats. You may be rogues fighting for us, but you are not as honorable as the others. I understand this clearing may be crowded, but it is the only thing you have.

"Some rules for all of you. Do not step into the MoonClan camp unless instructed, do not leave this clearing unless instructed,

do not steal any food or water from my MoonClan warriors, do not fight any MoonClan warriors, and do not try to escape. Breaking any of these rules will result in an easy death. Don't think you can beat me. You may be the toughest cat in the forest, but with the Dark Forest on my side, I can stop your heart in a pawstep. Got it?"

More nods came from the crowd.

"It's time to split up cats. I need you all to gather in groups. It is important to know that even though you may be from different rogue groups, you are all one now. You are MoonClan's army. Remember that. Now, I need kits- those under three moons- over to the right. Apprentices-those under six moons- next to the kits. Everyone else, gather to the left. Those who are considered elders will mix in with the others."

Cats moved quickly, and soon, the three categories stood before Hazelstar.

"Perfect," Hazelstar purred. "Now, those who are under three moons are not permitted to fight unless they wish. Queens, you are not permitted to fight unless you are a day from giving birth or have just given birth. Everyone else will fight.

"Now, your life in the clearing will be difficult. Only the toughest will survive. You'll be fed by my warriors, though it probably won't be enough. Sickness might spread, and unfortunately, MoonClan warriors get first dibs on medicine. Cats will die in this clearing, but if you are strong, you will survive.

"I can also not guarantee your safety in battle. Cats will die too. But know you are dying an honorable death, cats. Know that by joining MoonClan's army, you will be praised for your courageous choice.

"Fighting. This is a key part. I will be sending my warriors over to train you in groups. You will treat them with the highest and upmost respect. Practicing fighting in freetime is okay. If I find out you are killing each other, I will take you captive or separate any cats fighting. Please, practice without harming each other to a great extent!" Hazelstar hissed. "Any questions?"

"Where do we sleep?" a young cat asked.

"On the ground," Hazelstar growled. "This is your home for now. Once the battle is won, you will roam free in the woods, and you can boss our prisoners around."

Cats looked around in excitement at this idea.

"I will be sending cats over shortly. Please, get comfortable. These are your clanmates who will fight alongside you."

Hazelstar leapt down from the log, leaving the rogues to talk among themselves. Quickly, she padded back to camp, leaping onto the rock that sat in the center of the camp. Just by leaping onto it, she felt like Moonstar herself.

Memories flooded back to Hazelnose of her standing on this rock when she became an apprentice. She was only three moons at the time, but she remembered it clearly. While Leopardtail and Tigerstripe had been excited, she and Chesnuttail had cowered in fear. Everything was different now. Leopardtail was dead, Tigerstripe was missing, Hazelstar had turned evil, and Chesnuttail was still his old-self.

"Coward," she murmured. Her brother had been a coward for staying in FoxClan when he could've joined MoonClan himself.

"ATTENTION MOONCLAN!" Hazelstar yowled. Cats looked up and gathered beneath the rock, staring at their leader.

"I have talked to the rogues," Hazelstar explained. "Now that I have sorted them into groups, we will need many cats to help teach them fighting moves. Before I even begin appointing cats, I would like Crystal to run the entire program because she seems to get along best with the rogues."

Cats turned to the white she-cat who smiled. Hazelstar didn't know if giving her this big responsibility was wise or not.

"I will work well, Hazelstar, wait and see," Crystal replied.

"Not so fast," Hazelstar growled. "The cats that I appoint

need to do whatever it takes to get these cats to behave. I have already listed the rules they must follow. If one of these cats breaks a rule, kill them, show no mercy. Crystal will be in charge of assigning cats to train groups of cats. Some are small and weak, but we'll get that all sorted out in a few moments."

"Which cats do I choose, Hazelstar?" Crystal asked.

"Quiet!" Hazelstar spat. "You are commanding them but not appointing them. With this mission I require Screechshade, Shard, Raven, Berry, Cherry, Bloodfur, and Ice. Crystal, you make sure to rotate them in and out. They still must perform regular duties. When we capture FoxClan cats in a matter of days, I'll be assigning extra guards. Now, could all of you I have appointed follow me to the clearing. There is some business we must take care of there."

The cats nodded, and Crystal padded alongside Hazelstar as they crossed from the MoonClan camp into the clearing. Cats were talking to each other, a few arguing, others getting along well. At the sight of the MoonClan warriors, they froze.

"I'm glad to see you've all learned respect," Hazelstar laughed. "We're only here to do an inspection. Could I have all of you lined up in the previous groups you were in?"

It only took a few seconds for the cats to rearrange themselves.

"Good," Hazelstar purred.

As she padded by, all she thought of was *Be like Moonstar. Show no mercy. Be like Moonstar.*

"We are inspecting the condition of the cats!" Hazelstar announced. "Do not struggle if any of us grab you. Do not run off. Your death will only come quicker."

Cats looked around, confused by what she meant. The ones who did froze, cowering in fear.

"We'll start with the kits!" Hazelstar hissed.

The young kits stood, watching Hazelstar. Their eyes were widened by fear, and many were shaking in their pelts. Most were average size, a few larger, a few smaller. Some runts would do, and some wouldn't.

Standing with the kits were two small gray tabby she-cats, almost three moons. They were small though, and Hazelstar knew they wouldn't do.

"Screechshade, grab them," she instructed.

The kits mewed in fear as she grabbed ahold of them.

"Don't struggle," Screechshade hissed at them.

"What is the purpose of this?" Crystal asked Hazelstar. "Will they be fighting?"

"Some will. But I have many mouths to feed, and only the toughtest should be fed," Hazelstar growled.

From the crowd of kits, they took three more- a small ginger tom, a small white tom, and a blind she-cat.

"Take them over to the log," Hazelstar growled. "A few stand guard. We still have more cats to do."

Screechshade and Cherry padded over to the log while the others followed Hazelstar to the apprentices. Again, Hazelstar took a few small apprentices, as well as another blind cat.

Once they were marched over with the rest, Hazelstar inspected those who would be considered warriors. Very few were taken from there. A few small cats, a three legged cat, some cats with injuries that could not be healed. She also took a few older cats who looked as if they were about to collapse.

Marching them back to the log, cats stood, waiting for an explanation.

"This is a mercy killing!" Hazelstar spat.

Immediately, the cats began to cry out.

"Do not cry out and plead to stay alive!" Hazelstar hissed. "You will die! If any cat steps forward, they will be killed. Crystal, it was your idea to lead the cats here. You will kill these cats."

"Hazelstar, I—" Crystal began.

"Do not hesitate!" Hazelstar hissed.

"Fine. I will kill them, Hazelstar," Crystal said. The cats formed in a line, each one awaiting their own death.

As Hazelstar watched each one killed, each one cry out, she didn't move. She just stared and waited patiently. She did not feel the same as Moonstar though. While her mother craved death, Hazelstar wanted to vomit at the sight of it. She had to live up to her mother though.

When Crystal had finished, bodies of cats were piled up by her, and her paws were stained red. She looked as if she were about to vomit as well.

"We have wiped away those who would slow us down!" Hazelstar hissed at the rogues. "Bury their bodies if you wish. Training begins tomorrow. Be ready."

As she left, she turned her head, watching cats gather around the dead cats they had lost. Some were mourning, others were glaring at Hazelstar, but it didn't matter what they felt. She was their leader now, and she would do the same if they did not cooperate.

For a split second, she felt the same rage as Moonstar until it faded to Hazelstar fearing herself. What had she become?

Chapter 12

A few sunrises had passed since the killing of some rogues. Training had been going well, and all the cats had been cooperating. In the meantime, Hazelstar had been working out a strategy for capturing the FoxClan cats.

From the information she had gathered, her brother had lots of kin. He was apparently alive with his mate, Hollybreeze. Though Hollybreeze had two kits, her son had passed away, leaving her and Chesnuttail's daughter, Rosecloud, still alive.

Hazelstar's son, Treekit, Treestep now, was there as well. And he was Rosecloud's mate and the father to Rosecloud's three kits.

But that wasn't all Chesnuttail's kin. Cloverpelt had kits as well-three to be exact. Some had passed, but Chesnutfang, the tom named after her brother, was alive. He had no mate or kits, so getting him would be easy.

Also, Nightclaw, Hollybreeze's deceased son, had a mate named Lavenderwhisker with two kits. She would be capturing them as well. They all possessed precious MoonClan blood. Surely they would be good warriors.

Also, Rain, now Rainwhisker, who was Ice's son and Fire's brother, was the medicine cat of FoxClan. She'd be taking him and Tooth and Leopardtail's son, Cloudfoot, who was a warrior.

Hazelstar had thirteen cats to capture in a single night, and still, no sign of Tigerstripe and Jetfur. Where could her brother possibly be?

"Hazelstar," Fire said.

Hazelstar looked up, her thoughts fading away. "What is it?"

"Just checking to make sure you don't need anything," Fire said.

"Actually, I do need something. We need to assemble a plan to get these FoxClan cats, Fire."

"Are you ready to begin the plan?"

"Yes," Hazelstar told him. "I want to capture these cats tonight."

"Tonight?!" Fire exclaimed.

"Yes, tonight. We'll need about twenty cats, and some still have to stay here. We'll be taking some rogues, I imagine."

"Well, who do you need, Hazelstar?"

"I want you in charge of camp, Fire. You're the one I trust. I still want you to know the plan though. Maybe Shard, Ice, Screechshade."

"Haven't you heard the news, Hazelstar?"

"What news?" Hazelstar asked.

"Screechshade is expecting Fang's kits."

Hazelstar rolled her eyes. "Great," she murmured. "She still can prove to be a good warrior. Okay, here's what I want from you, Fire. I need you to go get Screechshade, Bloodfur, Bone, Fang, Snowflake, Peach, and Ice. That will leave you with some extra warriors."

"But they're all rogues, Hazelstar."

"Fine. Bone can stay with you."

"Could Ice?"

"Scared of the former deputy, are you?"

"No, of course not," Fire argued.

"Good. Tell Crystal to get the best and most loyal rogues. I need fourteen to be exact. Go now!"

"Yes, Hazelstar!" Fire exclaimed, running off.

Hazelstar sat in the center of the camp, waiting for cats to arrive. One by one, a few came towards her, asking about her plans.

"Wait for Crystal to bring the rogues," she instructed them before they asked any more questions.

A few moments later, Crystal came in, followed by many rogues. They sat down beside Hazelstar, all staring at her.

"Crystal, go!" Hazelstar spat.

Crystal nodded, running off.

Hazelstar turned, facing her clanmates and loyal rogues. "I have chosen my most loyal and trustworthy clanmates. I'm hoping Crystal has chosen her most faithful rogues," Hazelstar said, facing the rogues.

They nodded slowly.

"Good. Tonight, we are invading FoxClan camp to kidnap those who are of MoonClan descent or were former MoonClan warriors. My brother is one of them," Hazelstar explained. "We have twenty cats here, so this should be an easy mission. I ask that all questions will wait to the end."

Cats nodded as Hazelstar began to explain.

"FoxClan is located to the southeast of us in a small camp. There aren't many cats, which gives us an advantage. Only one patrol will be going by in the evening, and they'll probably stray far from the camp. Now, I'm going to sneak into FoxClan camp later this afternoon and carve large holes in the den. We will be sneaking into three dens to be exact. Since there are few warriors, it should be easy.

"Now, I don't know where each cat sleeps. We can't let cats

notice us. It is vital we are silent and stealth-like. We don't want a fight with FoxClan," Hazelstar explained. "You need to step over cats carefully, all right? You must give the cat that's sleeping a blow to the head, otherwise, they'll awake and freak out. When you do that, carefully lift them on your back and walk out. Not through the camp, understand? Through the back of the den."

Cats nodded slowly.

"Then we race back to camp. Now," Hazelstar began. "There are thirteen cats to capture, all right? I want to get my brother, so I'll assign cats to each of you. Bloodfur, you will get Hollybreeze. Do you remember her?"

"Vaguely," the ginger she-cat remarked.

"She's a black she-cat with thick fur. Don't mistaken her for her brother, Ravenclaw. He has a slick black pelt and he'll probably be sleeping by a silver she-cat. Hollybreeze will probably be sleeping next to my brother."

"Okay, got it," Bloodfur said.

"Ice," Hazelstar said. "I need you to capture my son."

"Your son?" Ice asked. "You have a son?"

"Yes," Hazelstar hissed. "Don't you remember my mother screeching at me being pregnant!"

"You left shortly after," Ice admitted. "I hadn't known of the birth of your kits."

"He is my only kit," Hazelstar told Ice. "He has a brown tabby pelt, like mine. He's tall and thin. His name is Treestep. Normally he would sleep by a calico she-cat, but she's in the nursery."

"What if I confuse him for another cat?"

"The only cat you could possibly confuse him for is Chesnutfang, another cat we need to capture," Hazelstar explained.

"Please, don't screw this up," she growled.

"Speaking of Chesnutfang, that's where you come in, Snowflake."

"I've never seen Chesnutfang before, Hazelstar," Snowflake admitted.

"He looks just like Chesnuttail. He has a dusty brown pelt. It's a bit thinner than my brother's, but you should know it's him when you see him," Hazelstar explained.

"Fang," Hazelstar said.

The white tom looked up.

"I already know who you're appointing me to," he explained.

"And who would that be?"

"Cloud, my brother."

"He's Cloudfoot now, and I'm sure you'll recognize him," Hazelstar explained.

"Peach, you have to get Rainwhisker," Hazelstar said, turning to the ginger she-cat.

"Who is he?" she asks.

"You're lucky I'm assigning you to an easy job. He's in the medicine cat den. Gray tabby tom. Can't miss him."

"My son," she heard Ice whisper quietly.

"All right, good," Peach purred.

"And for the rogues," Hazelstar said, turning to the rogues that stood near her. "You will be doing the nursery. I need four in the nursery. You have to be careful though. I need four she-cats."

Four stepped forward, looking at Hazelstar. "Thankfully,

Lavenderwhisker and her kits and Rosecloud and her kits are the only ones in the nursery. So you don't have to worry about stepping over cats. Still, be careful, don't make too much noise, and don't hit the kits hard. I don't want you killing them."

"Yes, we'll be careful," a white she-cat said.

"We strike tonight when the stars are shining," Hazelstar explained. "Be ready by then. I'm heading off to FoxClan now to carve the holes."

"Be safe," Fire warned.

Hazelstar ignored him and turned to her warriors. "Be prepared."

Slowly, she crept out of camp, racing up into the trees. She leapt from tree to tree until she entered FoxClan territory. Some cats padded by, others were hunting, but overall, there were few cats. Hazelstar even recognized a few that she would capture later that evening.

As she came upon the camp, she crept down into the bushes, quickly sneaking to the backside of their camp. The whole camp was familiar to her, and it almost made her stomach hurt in some sort of a way.

Finding the dens were easy, even from the back. She quickly knew that the largest was the warriors den. Aware cats were sleeping, she traced her claw along the back, making a large hole. She did not push it out though, afraid some cats would see.

With that finished, she headed to the back of the medicine cat den, creating the same hole. Then, the nursery.

With that finished, she crept back into the bushes and scurried up the nearest tree. The FoxClan cats hadn't noticed at all.

Idiots, she thought.

With the job done, she raced through the trees until she came out of the territory. She then headed back to MoonClan where

the plan would soon be in use.

Chapter 13

Once evening fell, the plan took place. At the edge of the MoonClan camp, the cats assembled by Hazelstar, the orange sun gleaming off their pelts. Hazelstar looked up, seeing the sky was beginning to turn indigo, and already, stars were shining.

"Hazelstar, are you sure about this?" Fire asked.

"Yes," she growled at her deputy. "You watch over the camp while we're gone. I'm hoping we don't have any FoxClan patrols coming after us," she growled, turning to face those in the mission.

"There won't be any trouble," Ice reassured her.

"I hope not," Hazelstar growled. "Remember no cat even knows MoonClan is evolving again. This kidnap will let the clan know we are back and we aren't to be messed around with. The full moon shines in two days, and when the clans gather, they'll probably talk about us. Patrols will most likely have to be stepped up."

"I'll get to work on that," Fire told Hazelstar. "Good luck. I know the plan will end up successful."

"Cats, let's go," Hazelstar instructed, beginning to pad through the forest quietly. Those in the mission followed behind her quietly as well as they trudged through the woods.

The sun had fully gone done now, only the starry sky visible. As Hazelstar continued down through their territory, she paused. Cats stopped by her, confused.

"We're nearing the territory," Hazelstar explained. "I like to leap into the trees for better coverage. Those who are not experienced tree climbers, stay below in the bushes and creep silently. There is probably a patrol going by."

The cats nodded slowly, a few following Hazelstar up the tree while others stayed down below. Hazelstar went through the FoxClan territory, jumping from tree to tree. She looked down, noticing her warriors creeping along the ground beside her.

Hazelstar sniffed the air, gasping as she realized a patrol was nearby. She froze, as did the other cats.

"Crouch down," she whispered.

Cats crouched down, shielded by leaves. Hazelstar watched as the patrol went by. It was led by not Sunstar, but a gray tabby she-cat. Immediately, Hazelstar recognized her. Cloverpelt. Was she the leader?

Her muscles twitched as she watched her friend go by. She wanted to strangle Cloverpelt, or she guessed her name was Cloverstar now, but she kept calm.

Once the patrol had passed, the cats continued until they came upon the camp. It was in a small clearing between the trees. The camp was small with only a few dens and not a very large fresh-kill pile. FoxClan would be an easy target though. SnowClan was large and it grew quickly while FoxClan was a smaller clan. It was easier to mess with them.

"Remember which cat you're getting. The holes have been cut out," Hazelstar whispered.

Cats nodded, and slowly, Hazelstar leapt down the tree, creeping into the bushes. The cats went around the back, a few keeping watch. She slowly removed the hole, revealing a den of sleeping cats.

Hazelstar watched as their chests rose and fell. How much longer would they? She suspected that by the end of the battle, half these cats would be dead.

Slowly, she motioned Bloodfur, Ice, Fang, and Snowflake forward. Hazelstar followed behind, carefully stepping over cats. She found her brother asleep next to Hollybreeze. He looked the

same as when she had last saw him. He possessed the same dusty brown pelt color, the same muscular legs and sharp claws. It was a shame his MoonClan blood had gone to waste on him.

But it wouldn't though. She knew these cats would fight for MoonClan in the battle. If they didn't, she'd just kill them.

"Hello, brother," she whispered. It was faint and quiet, enough so that not even her warriors could hear it.

Slowly, she traced her claw over his face, his ear twitching at her touch. Before he could open his eyes or awake, she brought her paw down, striking his head. As she moved her paw away, blood clung to her fur, and it seemed her brother's breaths were not slow and long anymore but quick and rapid.

She grabbed him by the scruff and threw him over her back, watching as the cats in the den with her did the same. Quickly, she motioned them out, trying to carefully walk over the cats. Chesnuttail was heavy though, and it was harder to walk by.

She gasped as she hit a paw, and she turned, looking at the cat sleeping. The cat's face was relaxed though, and Hazelstar was relieved he had not waken up.

Slowly, she padded out of the den and placed the den wall back, trying to seal it up well. Cats stood with the captives on their backs, waiting for the others to arrive.

Peach rushed up with Rainwhisker on her back quickly, and in a few moments, the four she-cats had Lavenderwhisker, Rosecloud, and five kits.

Hazelstar looked up, noticing her son on Ice's back. He looked just like Hazelstar remembered. He was tall and strong with a dark brown tabby pelt. She wished she could've seen him grow up.

"Go," Hazelstar whispered. "We must travel on ground now."

The cats nodded, beginning to slowly pad away from the camp. Soon, cats would notice, and an investigation would take

place.

Slowly, they exited the FoxClan territory, heading back to MoonClan. Hazelstar smiled, glad the plan had been a success.

As they reached the top of the hill where the MoonClan camp lay, cats panted, exhausted from carrying cats on their backs. Hazelstar wanted to tell them to stop whimpering about the pain, but her back hurt too from Chesnuttail.

"Hazelstar, you're back!" Fire exclaimed.

"Yes," Hazelstar told him. She slowly set the unconscious Chesnuttail down on the ground. "Take my brother to that large den we made to hold captives. The cats can takes theirs too."

"Where should we put them in the den?" Peach asked.

"Just set them down. I'll rearrange them and inspect them in a second," Hazelstar explained. "Fire, get ten guards pronto," Hazelstar snapped. "Even if it is some rogues. I want some guarding the camp too, as well as the territory. Ask Crystal for some."

"Yes, Hazelstar," Fire said, grabbing Chesnuttail. As soon as the tom was placed into the den, he ran off to the rogue camp to go retrieve rogues from Crystal.

Once the cats had finished placing the captives into the den, they went off to their dens to sleep. Fire arrived only moments later with ten guards behind him, as well as several other to guard the camp and territory.

"Crystal sent you these rogues, correct?" Hazelstar asked.

Fire nodded. "I didn't know who you wanted for each one," he explained.

Hazelstar examined the rogues, seeing which were the strongest and the quickest. She quickly assigned five thin and stealth-like rogues as well as five strong ones as well.

"Mix yourselves up and guard the den. I need some in the

back as well if any wish to escape."

"Five in front, five in back!" Fire yowled.

"As for the rest of you," Hazelstar explained, turning to face the other rogues. "I want guards placed at each corner of the camp. I'd say about eight to ten needed. Volunteers, step forward."

She watched as the rogues stepped forward, eager to help Hazelstar.

"The rest of you I need scattered throughout the territory. I want five on the border and the rest scattered throughout. We'll switch out with others each day so you can get rest and food."

The cats nodded, running off. Hazelstar smiled, glad the plan was in use. She then padded towards the captive den, staring at the guards.

"Keep watch," she told them. "If any cats escape, I'll slit your throat," she growled.

The guards gulped and nodded, allowing her to pass through inside the den.

She walked in, seeing several cats scattered throughout. She smiled, glad it had all worked out well.

She padded towards her brother, finding him still unconscious.

"You filthy tom," she spat, leaving a claw mark down his pelt. He didn't wake up though. His body jerked, that was all.

Hazelstar padded over to his mate, Hollybreeze, who sat crumpled up against the den. Bloodfur had done a good job knocking her out judging by the sticky blood that clumped onto her pelt.

She rolled her eyes, hissing at the she-cat. She looked over at Rosecloud, their daughter, unconscious as well. The three kits lay beside her, unconscious as well. Hazelstar took a step forward,

inspecting the kits more clearly. There was a black tom, a ginger tom, and a brown tabby she-cat whose pelt color resembled Hazelstar's. She gagged at this, looking over at Lavenderwhisker.

The white she-cat's two kits lay beside her too. There was a black tom that resembled his father and a white she-cat that resembled Lavenderwhisker. Hazelstar would learn all the kits' names soon enough.

Hazelstar flicked her gaze over to Chesnutfang, the tom who resembled his father. She growled as she looked at him, only seeing her brother in him.

Then, there was Rainwhisker and Cloudfoot, original MoonClan members. She had remembered hearing of their betrayal as they went off to FoxClan to start new lives. But now, they were stuck in the same spot they had been in, and this time, there was no escape.

Hazelstar looked up, noticing her son in the corner. He was curled up, still unconscious like the rest. Hazelstar padded towards him, sitting down beside him. Slowly, she stroked his pelt with her tail.

She didn't know if she felt motherly love towards him, or maybe it was just all an act to get him to trust her. Still, she was almost glad to see him.

At her touch, Treestep's eyes lazily opened. They were green, like Hazelstar's. They were green, like Moonstar's.

"Wh-what? Who's there?" Treestep asked.

"Welcome to MoonClan, my son. I praise you for joining," she laughed. Treestep's eyes widened as Hazelstar brought her paw down against his head, knocking him out.

She laughed maliciously once more, creeping out of the den. But as she left, she didn't feel much rage, just sickness inside her. Was this how Moonstar felt?

Chapter 14

Hazelstar awakened to hear cats calling her name. Her ear twitched, and she looked up, noticing Fire running towards her.

"Hazelstar, your prisoners have awaken. They're causing a riot inside that den," Fire complained.

Hazelstar quickly stood up. "Are the guards doing their job?"

"Yes, they're controlling them, but they all wish to speak to you," Fire explained.

"Very well," Hazelstar purred. "I'll confront them," she said, exiting her den. Already, she could hear the cries and mews coming from the prisoners. She could hear the queens telling their kits to hush, she could hear familiar voices calling her name.

She headed towards the captive den, seeing guards holding cats back and growling. Blood was splattered across the ground, though the cats would not retreat.

"Halt!" Hazelstar spat at the guards. They froze, still holding the captives back.

"I understand my prisoners wish to speak with me."

"They do," one of the guards said.

"Very well. Keep close behind me," she growled, padding in the entrance of the den. Immediately, Chesnutfang raced at her. It only took her a second to leave a claw streak down his face.

The cats stood at Hazelstar, their eyes widened in surprise.

"Ah, my family, it's so nice to see you all," she purred.

"Hazelnose!" Chesnuttail spat, standing up. He had a long

clawmark down his pelt, and blood was dripping down from it.

"Brother, it's good to see you," she laughed.

Chesnuttail growled at this.

Hazelstar looked around at the cats, waiting for silence. "I'm only hear to talk, but if any of you would like to battle me right now, consider yourself dead," she growled.

"We'd rather be dead!" Rainwhisker spat.

Hazelstar looked up at the gray tabby tom. "Oh, if it isn't the former MoonClan cat who left after battle. I heard you watched your sister get murdered right in front of you. Wouldn't it be a shame for these cats to witness your murder?"

Rainwhisker let out a low growl, but he didn't move.

"Last night you were taken from FoxClan to participate in this new plan. Moonstar graciously appointed me leader of the new MoonClan, and together, we'll take over this forest!"

"We'll never fight for you!" Rosecloud spat, three kits hiding behind her.

Hazelstar took a step forward and traced a claw over her throat. "Rosecloud," she purred. "You're Chesnuttail and Hollybreeze's daughter. I heard your brother has passed."

"Yes," she growled.

"Keep your mouth shut. I don't think you'd like your kits witnessing such violence at such a young age," she said, gazing down at them. One of the kits whimpered and hid behind her.

"Enough!" Treestep spat.

"Treestep," Hazelstar growled. "How good to see you, you traitor!"

Rosecloud turned to Treestep in fear. "You know her? What

does she mean, Treestep?"

"You haven't even told your mate?" Hazelstar laughed. She then turned to Rosecloud. "I'm surprised he's kept this secret from you all too long. Treestep is my son, and he was meant to come to FoxClan to finish what Moonstar started. But he didn't..."

"I would never!" Treestep hissed. "I already knew this plan was insane. I believed you were insane when I was a kit! Now I know it's true!" he hissed, stepping forward.

Hazelstar immediately shoved him in the stomach for her paw, causing him to fall back. He let out a deep groan, and a hiss from Rosecloud followed.

"Don't bother! He won't die!" she growled. "All of you will be fighting for MoonClan, whether you like it or not. If you don't, you will die a cold and painful death. I'll be sure it's nice and long and that every cat can witness it."

This shut up the captives.

"Let's lay out some rules, shall we?" Hazelstar asked. "Each morning you will train with one of our professional warriors. You will put your life into this training. Failing to follow instructions will leave you with wounds only time can heal."

"Surely the kits won't train," Lavenderwhisker gulped.

"They will train as apprentices!" Hazelstar hissed. "You'll be fed, not a lot, but enough to keep you alive at least."

"And if we refuse?" Cloudfoot asked.

"I think I've already made that clear," Hazelstar growled, holding up a claw.

"This is a crazy plan, Hazelnose!" Chesnuttail hissed. "You're crazier than our mother!"

Hazelstar swatted his ear. "Our mother wasn't crazy. She was a genius! And it's Hazel*star*. Only refer to me by that name!"

"Chesnuttail," Hollybreeze warned.

"Hello, Hollybreeze," Hazelstar purred. "I'm sure you remember me."

"Oh, very clearly, Hazelstar," Hollybreeze growled. "Chesnuttail might have not been able to detect evil from you, but I did at a very young age."

"You're a bit of a smart one, aren't you? I'd keep that tongue of yours quiet," Hazelstar growled.

"Don't threaten my mate!" Chesnuttail hissed.

Another blow to the pelt.

"Which one?" Hazelstar asked. "You're nothing but a pathetic tom who breaks the hearts of she-cats. Tell me, how many kits do you have? Five? And from how many she-cats?"

"Quiet!" Chesnutfang hissed. "Leave my father alone!"

"Mother, this is crazy!" Treestep hissed, launching at her.

"That does it!" she growled, pushing him to the ground. She shoved her claws into his stomach, causing him to yowl in pain.

"Kits, look away!" Rosecloud hissed, shrouding them in fur.

She held Treestep down and held a claw over his throat. "Will you behave now?"

Treestep nodded slowly.

Hazelstar slowly got off of him, blood pouring from his side. Rosecloud rushed to his side in fear.

"Don't worry. He won't die," she growled. "You better hope he doesn't get any more wounds though."

"Now," Hazelstar said, seeing the captives exhausted. "You will treat all of my warriors with respect. Don't bother escaping.

You'll just be killed. There's no kind hearted she-cat this time to rescue you," Hazelstar growled, looking at Chesnuttail.

He of course knew exactly who she was talking about. Snowfeather.

"Training will take place in the morning. I'm sure FoxClan patrols are already searching for you. We'll take care of them. Now, why not introduce me to those kits?" she asked.

Rosecloud gulped and went first. "This is Blackkit," she said, pointing to the black tom who resembled Rosecloud's mother and her brother, Nightclaw. "This is Brownkit," she said, pointing to the she-cat who looked like Treestep. "And this is Copperkit," she said at last, pointing to a golden tom.

"Very good. But now they are Blackpaw, Brownpaw, and Copperpaw," she said.

Rosecloud let out a slow nod, then turned her gaze to Lavenderwhisker.

The white she-cat stood with her two kits and took a deep breath. She first introduced the black tom who looked like her mate. "This is Shadekit," she said. She then pointed to the white she-cat. "This is Violetkit. Though I suppose they are Shadepaw and Violetpaw."

"You catch on quickly," she purred. "Sweet dreams and until tomorrow," she growled, padding out of the den. Immediately, the guards took their original place.

No sooner did Hazelstar make it to her den, a rogue came rushing towards her.

"Hazelstar!" the large brown tabby tom cried.

"What is it?" she asked.

"There is a FoxClan patrol on the way! They're here to retrieve the prisoners!" he exclaimed.

"Do the others know?"

"I've already sent out message," the tom cried.

"Perfect," Hazelstar purred. "Make sure they don't attack, but don't let them pass. I'll gather an army."

The tom seemed confused by this, but he nodded and went off.

"Fire!" Hazelstar hissed.

"I'm already assembling!" Fire exclaimed.

As soon as the army was assembled, they followed Hazelstar through the territory, following directions from the rogues who guarded the camp.

Hazelstar paused, noticing a gray tabby she-cat. Cloverpelt.

"HALT!" she hissed.

The FoxClan cats turned. Hazelstar watched as Cloverpelt's eyes widened.

"Hazelnose? Is that you?" she asked.

"It's Hazel*star* now, you filthy traitor!" she spat.

Cloverpelt growled and took a step towards her. "I suppose you happen to know about my clanmates who went missing last night?"

"Call off your army and I'll be pleased to tell you."

"Call of yours as well," Cloverpelt growled.

"Very well," Hazelstar said. She watched as her army stepped back, followed by FoxClan's.

"What do you know about my clanmates?" she asked.

"They're safe in MoonClan."

Cloverpelt's eyes widened. "M-MoonClan?"

"You heard me right, pathetic she-cat. MoonClan. As in Moonstar's MoonClan. I'm the new leader, and I've come to reclaim my former members."

"They are not your former members!" Cloverpelt spat. "They are FoxClan members!"

"Perhaps they were, but not anymore."

"You can't take them away!" she growled.

"I will or you will deal with the powers of my clanmates and the entire Dark Forest! And I suppose you, a scrawny leader is going to stop me?"

"I was surprised you found out about my leadership," Cloverstar growled. "But we have StarClan on our side."

"Perhaps, but you have how many members? Five now? Listen, Clover*star*, an attack today would only cost more of your members. Fight in the battle that will take place soon."

Cloverstar let out a growl. "Fine. We won't attack today, but keep your eyes out, Hazel*star*."

Hazelstar watched as they walked away, and she let out a smile. *Good. This is all going very well.*

Chapter 15

Hazelstar sat perched on the rock in the center of their camp, smiling as the guards brought the captives forward. As they walked, it was as if their hearts had been shattered and all hope was lost. They would drag their feet and look down, not daring to make eye contact with their leader.

"Eyes up here!" Hazelstar snapped. When a few refused to look at her, they were greeted by a pawsmack to the head. Soon, eyes were gazing up at her.

"Thank you," Hazelstar purred. "MoonClan is so thrilled to have you here. Each of you will be training in a group with one of our loyal warriors, so I hope you're prepared," she purred.

"But first," she began, "Let's make our lovely kits apprentices. Come up here, kits," she said, calling up Rosecloud and Lavenderwhisker's kits. Slowly, their mothers scooted them forward and they raced up.

"We will make this quick," Hazelstar began. "Which is the older litter?"

"Us," called one of Rosecloud's kits. It was the she-cat who resembled Hazelstar.

"Very well. Step forward, you three."

The three kits stood next to Hazelstar as she begin. "Since these FoxClan kits have graciously accepted to train to be MoonClan warriors, we will make them apprentices now. Blackkit," she began, looking at the black tom.

He turned in fear, and she noticed he was shaking from head to toe.

"Your new name will be Blackpaw. Mentors will be saved until the end of the ceremony," she announced. "Brownkit," she said, turning to the small version of herself. "Your new name will be Brownpaw until you receive your warrior name."

Brownpaw nodded slowly, gulping.

"And Copperkit," Hazelstar said, turning to face the ginger tom. "Until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Copperpaw."

"BLACKPAW! BROWNPAW! COPPERPAW!" the clan

cheered. The captives seemed to look down in embarrassment.

"Now for the other litter," Hazelstar announced, calling Lavenderwhisker's kits forward.

The tom stepped forward first, his sister following behind him.

"Shadekit, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Shadepaw," she yowled, looking at the black tom.

"And Violetkit," she said, turning to face the white she-cat. "You shall be known as Violetpaw."

"SHADEPAW! VIOLETPAW!" the clan cried.

"Let's make this simple then," Hazelstar said, facing the five small kits. "We'll split up boys and girls. Blackpaw, Copperpaw, and Shadepaw," she said, looking into the crowd. Who would she choose for their mentor? It had to be someone good and clever...

"Fang," she growled.

The white tom padded forward.

"I trust you to mentor these three toms. Show no mercy," she growled. "Take them around the territory and get to work."

"Yes, Hazelstar," he said, dipping his head. "Come now, toms," he said.

The three kits slowly made their way down, looking at their parents, for it might be the last time they saw them. Then, they left the camp, leaving the two she-cats.

"As for you two, Brownpaw and Violetpaw, your mentor will be...Berry," she said.

The white and ginger she-cat padded forward, though she looked nervous. Hazelstar was nervous too, afraid the she-cat wouldn't be good enough to teach them.

"Thank you for this honor, Hazelstar," Berry began. "I will show no mercy," she said, locking eyes with the two she-cats. "Follow me now."

Brownpaw slowly padded down, but Violetpaw stayed put.

"Go on!" Hazelstar hissed, shoving the she-cat.

Slowly, she leapt down the rock after her trainee and mentor.

"Now that the apprentices have been dealt with, it's time to teach our FoxClan warriors how to be MoonClan warriors. We'll most likely work in groups of three," she began.

Hazelstar scanned the crowd, looking at her captives.

"Once again, toms and she-cats will be split up. Rosecloud,

Lavenderwhisker, and Hollybreeze, step forward."

The three she-cats obeyed her orders.

"Bloodfur," Hazelstar snapped.

Slowly, the she-cat made her way out of the crowd, bowing to her leader.

"You've proved well in the past. Show these she-cats how to be true warriors," she commanded.

"Yes, Hazelstar," Bloodfur gulped. "Follow me now, she-cats!"

The she-cats looked back at their mates before following. Then, they headed off.

Hazelstar looked at the the rest of her captives. Five toms. They'd have to be split up.

"Chesnuttail and Cloudfoot, step forward."

The two toms did, staring up at Hazelstar.

"Bone," she growled.

The tom padded forward, his emerald green eyes staring at the two captives.

"You remember these two traitors very well, correct?"

"Yes, Hazelstar," Bone growled.

"Then I trust you to teach them well. Now go!" she yowled, watching as they ran off.

The last cats that remained were Rainwhisker, Treestep, and Chesnutfang. She would easily find someone to mentor them.

"All right, you three. Your mentor will be Shard," she commanded.

The gray tom looked shocked that she would pick him, but he stepped forward and bowed.

"This way, kittypets," he laughed maliciously. Then, the toms went off.

"Fire!" Hazelstar yowled.

The ginger tom padded forward.

"Yes?"

"Go get Crystal to organize guards. I want five guarding each group. Three guarding the apprentices. Now go!" she yowled.

The tom nodded and ran off, leaving the camp empty like it had before. Cats stood guarded while others hunted or did patrols. A few were to bring food and water to the rogue camp nearby.

"At last, peace," she purred. She knew Tigerstripe and Jetfur still had to be found, but she would wait and relax a little bit before

getting into that mess. No, right now she needed peace.

An ear-splitting yowl rang through the air, and Hazelstar growled.

"What now?"

"MY KITS ARE COMING!" Snowflake yowled.

It was true. Hazelstar had sent her to the nursery the previous night as she was getting fairly big and would deliver soon.

Hazelstar looked around, knowing they had no medicine cat.

"Screechshade!" she yowled.

The brown she-cat padded forward. Her stomach too was beginning to look plump.

"What?"

"Help me deliver Snowflake's kits."

"I'm not a medicine cat," she growled.

"No, but we don't have any! Peach, Cherry, come help with your sister!" she yowled at the two ginger she-cats.

The three followed Hazelstar into the nursery where Snowflake yowled in pain, her eyes red from crying.

"Grab a stick," Hazelstar instructed to Screechshade.

The she-cat stuck one in Snowflake's mouth.

"Bite when the pain comes," Hazelstar told her. She remembered sitting in the woods when she had given birth to Treestep. It had been painful, though she had remembered how births had been done in FoxClan, and that had helped.

"It'll be okay," Peach told her sister, coaxing her.

"Where's Shard?" Snowflake asked.

"Training. He'll see the kits later," Hazelstar growled. "That means you'll most likely be naming them."

"But shouldn't he choose too?"

"He won't return until evening, now push!" Hazelstar growled.

Snowflake yowled as the first kit was born. The first was a white tom. Quickly, Cherry pushed the tom towards his mother where he began to suckle.

"Is that all?" she asked.

Screechshade felt Snowflake's belly. "I don't think so."

Snowflake groaned, crying out in pain as the second kit was born. It was a she-cat, her pelt a bright white like her mother's and brother's.

"One more," Screechshade told Snowflake. "You're doing great."

"Oh, shut up!" she growled, yowling as the last kit was born. Hazelstar watched as a tumble of gray fur slid onto the moss. It was a gray she-cat, resembling her father.

"You're done," Screechshade told Snowflake.

"Thank goodness," Snowflake breathed, licking her three kits. "Two she-cats and a tom," she purred.

"Congratulations," Cherry purred.

"Yes, yes, it's all good fun. Cherry, Peach, back to work. You too, Screechshade. I'll take care of the naming business with Snowflake," Hazelstar instructed.

"Whatever you say, Hazelstar," Screechshade said, exiting the den.

Hazelstar turned back to Snowflake who smiled at her kits.

"Have you decided names?"

Snowflake frowned. "It feels wrong naming them without Shard."

"He'll be fine."

"I think I'll give them clan names," Snowflake said, looking up at Hazelstar.

"All right. Clan names it is. Do you have any?"

Snowflake thought for a moment. "The white tom can be Wolfkit," she said, licking her only son.

"And the white she-cat...Arctickit," she said. "She reminds me of myself," she giggled.

Hazelstar rolled her eyes. "What about the gray she-cat?"

"Graykit," Snowflake decided.

"How creative," Hazelstar groaned. "Well, Shard will see them after training. Congrats."

She then exited the den, going into the her den to rest.

When evening did fall, the word spread fast that Snowflake had given birth. Shard padded into camp quickly, rushing to the nursery to see his new kits. Rainwhisker, Treestep, and Chesnutfang were escorted by guards behind them, their pelts coated in dried blood. It had most likely been a rough day.

Hazelstar stood put in the center of the camp, watching as other cats made their way back. The she-cats were not as beat up, but they did have scratches, and it looked like a chip of Hollybreeze's ear was missing.

The three tom apprentices followed behind, dragging their feet behind them. At the sight of their mothers, they ran to them in tears.

Following behind was Chesnuttail and Cloudfoot. Cloudfoot didn't seem too beat up, but Chesnuttail had an awful wound on his leg.

The two she-cat apprentices followed behind, having the least amount of scratches. Still, they seemed tired and exhausted.

Hazelstar watched as the captives gathered back in their den, probably hating the idea of returning to training the next day.

You'll suffer just like I did, Hazelstar thought before entering her den to rest.

Chapter 16

A few days had passed since the capture of the FoxClan cats, and so far, they had all been cooperating well. Most had learned how to

behave, though some had injuries to prove their disobedience. No cat had died though, and they would be fighting in the battle, no exceptions.

Hazelstar opened her eyes, a nervous feeling in her stomach. The capture had gone successful but there were two cats that had not yet returned. Tigerstripe, her brother, and that other she-cat, Jetfur.

She had hoped they would show up on their own, but it had been moons, and leaf-fall was fast approaching. They had to be ready by then, no exceptions.

She rose to her feet then padded out of the den, already seeing cats being trained. Some of the MoonClan members snapped at the former FoxClan cats while others received a claw mark down their face.

Hazelstar looked down as she went past the kits. It was wrong, so wrong, but she belonged solely to the Dark Forest now, and mercy did not apply to their rules.

"Fire!" she snapped.

The ginger tom quickly padded forward, his emerald eyes gazing into Hazelstar's.

"Is there something I can assist you with?"

"No, but there's a matter we need to discuss," Hazelstar growled. "Follow me to my den."

Fire nodded as they went off. Hazelstar padded into her dark den, sitting down on her soft nest.

"Well, get comfortable!" Hazelstar snapped at Fire who stood awkwardly by the entrance. He sat facing her, looking around.

"Fire, there are two members who have not yet arrived. Can you guess who they are?"

Fire pondered for a moment. "Your brother, Tigerstripe, and that black she-cat."

"Jetfur, that's right. My mother told me they would not come, and they haven't. So I need your help."

"What could I do?"

"I need you to organize a secret group of cats to find my brother and his friend. I don't want any other cat knowing about this, all right? Does Crystal have rogues to offer?"

"Yes, like always," Fire explained. "Come on, I'll take you to her."

Hazelstar padded out of the camp with her deputy to the familiar clearing where the rogues gathered. They were busy training, some eating, others resting. No more executions had to be made, though a few had died already. They had been buried in a large hole the others had dug, and that was where the dead rogues were stored.

Crystal stood on the familiar dead branch, her white pelt gleaming in the sunlight. At the sight of Fire, her eyes lit up, though they quickly dimmed as she noticed Hazelstar standing behind him.

Hazelstar didn't like the she-cat one bit, but she could be trusted to do her job, and she did it well. That was what mattered.

Crystal slowly leapt down from the tree log, walking forward to greet the two.

"Hazelstar, I had not expected you," Crystal admitted. "We're there more executions scheduled?"

"I don't believe there will be anymore," Hazelstar explained. "I'm here for another matter. I need a patrol of rogues, those that are

strong and can be trusted."

"What for?"

"That is none of your business!" Hazelstar spat.

"So I'm just supposed to hand off a bunch of rogues to you for no reason?! I'm in control here, you piece of fox dung! Why do you need them?!"

"That does it!" Hazelstar hissed, knocking the she-cat over. Crystal hit the ground quickly, moaning in pain. Hazelstar shoved her claws into the she-cat's pelt, growling.

Crystal looked up, whimpering as her blue eyes were filled with pain.

"Hazelstar, get off her!" Fire spat.

"Shut up!" she hissed. "As my deputy you are required to listen to what I say! If that means you have to watch me teach your precious mate a lesson, then it shall be!"

Fire opened his mouth to argue before closing it again and taking a step back.

"Leave him out of this," Crystal managed to say.

"I had hoped your strength would be gone by now," Hazelstar admitted, twisting her claws. Crystal cried out in pain.

"So listen to me, she-cat," she growled. All the rogues had stopped training now, all their attention focused on Hazelstar.

"If you ever try to rebel against me again, I will kill you. But I'll make the death slow and painful. Oh, and won't it be a joy to see Fire watching you die? And knowing that he can't do anything to save you...What a shame. So, will you listen to me, she-cat?"

Crystal nodded slowly, sighing in relief as Hazelstar's claws slid away from her bloody body.

"Now, give me a patrol..."

Crystal nodded slowly then weakly rose to her feet. Fire bolted to her side, helping her up. Blood dripped from her pelt, but she wouldn't die. She'd have a scar, no doubt.

After about ten minutes, Crystal returned with ten rogues following behind her.

"Will these do?"

"It depends. Are they trustworthy?"

"They wish nothing more than to serve MoonClan," Crystal explained. "Right?"

Slowly, the cats nodded.

"All right. Rogues, follow me. Fire, take Crystal to be stitched up. I expect her to be back tomorrow though."

"Yes, Hazelstar," Fire said, padding off with the bloody Crystal. The rogues turned, staring at Hazelstar.

"Follow me," she growled, leading them into the woods. After walking a bit of a distance, she stopped by a large tree, sitting down against it.

"Sit," she instructed.

Slowly, the rogues sat, waiting for her instructions.

"Now," Hazelstar began. "You may believe this is all going smoothly, but, there are two cats who I long to see. That is my brother and his friend. They were supposed to arrive, being original MoonClan members, but they refuse. That is where you come in. I need you all to search for them. I don't know how long it will take, but you need to bring them back, even if it means knocking them out. Still, I want them alive."

The rogues slowly nodded.

"We can do that," a tom said.

"Good. But I want the matter secret. No cat can know, all right? Trust only those you know. Now scram! Return soon!"

The cats nodded, running off into the woods.

"Did you hear that, brother? You're coming to me soon," she laughed maliciously, rushing off into the woods.

Chapter 17

A few days had passed since Hazelstar had sent the rogues out to find her brother and that awful she-cat. She had heard no word since, and she'd been becoming nervous. What if they weren't found? Would Moonstar punish her?

The day was clouded over as she padded outside. A cold breeze swept across the camp, making Hazelstar shiver in her thin pelt. Leaf-fall had nearly arrived, and already they'd fallen behind in their plans.

"We must step up apprentices and training," she murmured, heading over to the fresh-kill pile. She watched as Crow, about three moons now, wrestled with his mother, Raven. She eyed the tom, watching his skills. He was quick, clever- a good MoonClan warrior.

"Raven! Crow!" Hazelstar snapped.

Immediately, the two froze, as if they thought they were in trouble. She didn't blame them for believing that though. Most of the time she only called cats who were in trouble over.

Raven cautiously made her way towards Hazelstar with Crow trailing behind his mother. The she-cat stood in front of Hazelstar, letting out a sigh.

"Sorry, I know we should be working," she whimpered.

Hazelstar towered over the small black she-cat, and she eyed her. "That is not why I called you over. I called you over because I wish to make Crow an apprentice of MoonClan."

Raven's eyes widened. "An apprentice?! But, Hazelstar, he's barely three months old!"

"I want to be an apprentice!" Crow argued.

Hazelstar swore those were the first words she had ever heard the tom speak.

"Are you sure about this, Hazelstar?" Raven asked.

"Positive," Hazelstar grinned. "The tom must learn to fight if he wishes to survive battle, right?"

"I suppose so," Raven sighed, looking down at her paws.

"Come here," Hazelstar told Crow. "It's time to make you an honorary apprentice of MoonClan."

"I can't wait!" Crow exclaimed, bouncing up and down.

Hazelstar made her way to the front of the camp, leaping up onto the large rock that stood in the center. Crow followed behind, smiling at the confused MoonClan cats.

"CATS OF MOONCLAN!" Hazelstar shouted. "I SEEK ALL OF YOUR ATTENTION!"

The cats in camp turned, their eyes focused on their leader.

"Crow has been with us since the beginning, and now that he has reached three moons, I believe it is time to make him an apprentice!" she shouted.

Cats cheered wildly while Raven and Cliff stood together, a nervous expression on their faces.

"Crow, do you wish to keep your old name or choose a clan name?"

Crow looked up at Hazelstar, his green eyes focused on hers. "I would like to keep my name, Hazelstar."

"Then from this day forward, until you are crowned a warrior, you shall be known as Crow!" she shouted.

"CROW! CROW!" the clan cried.

Hazelstar watched as the captives peeked their heads out of the den to see what was going on.

"And now for your mentor," she said, scanning the room.

"Peach!" she yowled.

The light ginger she-cat padded forward, gulping as she looked up at Hazelstar.

"Y-Yes?"

"You will mentor Crow. I expect great things from him," she said.

Peach nodded. "I will teach him everything I know, Hazelstar."

"And?"

Peach gulped and said quietly, "I'll show no mercy."

"Very well. Go, Crow. Meet your mentor," Hazelstar growled, pushing the young tom forward.

He padded down the rock, touching his nose to Peach. They then went off into the forest to begin their training.

"BACK TO WORK!" Hazelstar hissed, watching as the crowd broke away.

As Hazelstar padded down the abrasive rock, Cliff made his way towards Hazelstar, a look of disapproval on his face.

"Why so glum, Cliff?" she joked.

He only glared at her.

"Are you trying to get my only son killed?"

"Killed?! Never!" Hazelstar exclaimed. "He is learning to be a MoonClan warrior, Cliff."

"He'll die!" Cliff shouted.

Hazelstar knocked him aside and pinned him down. "Have faith in your son and he won't!" she spat.

"I only want what's best for him."

"Then perhaps joining this clan was a mistake!" she growled.

Cliff slowly stood up and padded off, leaving Hazelstar to growl at him as he padded back to his mate.

"THIS CLAN IS FALLING APART!" she shouted, enough to make cats turn their attention towards her.

Fire made his way past the cats and padded to his leader's side.

"Hazelstar, is everything all right?" Fire asked.

"Come with me," Hazelstar told him, leading him into her den. Once again, he stood awkwardly by the entrance, not daring to sit.

"Sit," Hazelstar murmured, rolling her eyes.

Fire sat, his emerald eyes fixed on Hazelstar.

"I worry for this clan. I don't think Moonstar would've run it this way. She's putting her faith in me, and now, cats think they can argue with me whenever we like. No, I must prove to them that I'm the supreme ruler!"

"Hazelstar, aren't you overreacting? Cats are doing fine. They *listen* to you."

"But not like Moonstar," she sighed.

Fire sighed. "Listen, Hazelstar. You're not Moonstar, even though you try to be. You can't be exactly like her, but maybe that's a good thing. Where did she end up?"

"Shush!" Hazelstar spat. "She can hear you!"

"No, she can't."

"Yes! Who do you think visits me in my dreams? Do you know what I told Moonstar if I failed? I said she could take my life!"

Fire shrunk down. "I wasn't aware of that, Hazelstar. If you want, we could step up guards..."

"No! That does nothing! I must prove to them how powerful I am! Perhaps I should kill more cats!"

"You're only killing off warriors in battle. Please, continue what you are doing, but don't kill. We're too close to battle."

"No, we aren't. We are still nearly two moons away, Fire."

"Then I leave you to take care of the clan, Hazelstar," Fire said, padding away.

"DON'T WALK OUT ON ME YOU DISRESPECTFUL DEPUTY!" she spat. But he did not turn around, and for some reason, she let him go.

"What have I turned into?" she breathed.

By the time night fell, Hazelstar sat in her nest, watching as stars lit up the sky. Each time she tried to close her eyes though, she was afraid Moonstar would come after her and criticize her for something new.

"No, I must sleep. It's best for my clan," she told herself.

She let her eyelids fall, only to be awoken by a noise so faint, she wondered if she was only imagining it.

But she couldn't have. No, this sounded like footsteps and scraping.

Curious, she padded outside her den, seeing the guards standing near the captive den. Something was not right though. The

guards didn't seem to be paying much attention, and then, the noise came once more.

"GUARDS!" she hissed.

One jolted awake.

"HOW DARE YOU SLEEP!" she growled, swiping one in the head.

"What is it, Hazelstar?" one asked.

"I heard a noise. Check the prisoners!" she growled.

As they padded into the den, Hazelstar swept around the back. Suddenly, she gasped as she saw the figure of a cat disappear into some bushes. It was a figure she could not mistaken for anyone else...Chesnuttail.

Her brother had tried to escape, but oh, she would catch him. Slowly, she made her way near the bush, knowing her brother stood in it. She was clever though, and she slipped away into the shadows, climbing up a nearby tree.

She waited a few minutes, listening to the yells of cats as they searched the grounds for the prisoner.

Hazelstar had her eyes fixed on the bush, and after a few minutes, Chesnuttail slid out. Hazelstar creeped onto a branch, then slowly, leapt down, landing on top of her brother.

He made a terrible sound as she fell onto him, and he let out a deep groan.

"THINK YOU COULD ESCAPE, HUH?!" she spat, shoving her claws into his side.

He wailed, letting out a cry.

"Don't you ever try this again, you piece of fox dung!" she spat, streaking her claws down his face.

He let out a wail she had never heard before. "I PROMISE! I WON'T!" he cried.

"Good!" she growled, getting off of him.

He could barely move, and he groaned, slowly rising to his feet before collapsing altogether.

"GUARDS!" Hazelstar spat.

It only took a few seconds for two rogues to come towards her.

"I've done your job!" she growled, leaving a clawstreak down each of their faces. "Don't fall asleep next time! Grab the prisoner, and cover up that hole he dug!"

It had to be the only way Chesnuttail could escape. Otherwise, he would have had to get past the guards surrounding the camp. No, going out the back was easier. He thought he could escape just like he did years ago.

Hazelstar let out a sigh in relief as they carried Chesnuttail away. She made her way to her den, freezing as she saw something out of the corner of her eye. She turned, thinking she saw nothing.

But no, she had seen something. Coming up the hill were two dark, cat-like figures...

Chapter 18

Hazelstar froze, watching as the two cats made their way towards the camp. Were they FoxClan cats? SnowClan cats? She wasn't sure.

She took a step forward, about to yell out an attack call, when two guards, who were exactly doing their job, shouted, "HALT!"

Hazelstar watched from afar as the two guards held the cats back. They did not squirm or try to move past. They stood completely still.

"Get Hazelstar!" one shouted.

"I'M ALREADY HERE!" Hazelstar shouted, racing through the woods up to the hill that glowed in the moonlight.

The guards froze, turning to face their leader.

"We've caught two trespassing cats," one said.

Hazelstar took a step closer, examining the two. One was a fluffy gray tom with a white stomach and paws. The other was a brown tabby tom with green eyes and a thin pelt. Both looked scared out of their wits.

"Thank you, guards. Please, let me speak to these toms," she said, taking a step forward.

"We've heard much about you and MoonClan, Hazelstar," the gray one said, bowing. The brown tabby bowed beside him.

"And who are you? Where do you come from?"

"I am Rabbitfur," the gray tom said. "This is my son, Deerheart. We're exiled members of NightClan."

NightClan, a place Hazelstar had heard about very little. She knew it stood by FoxClan and SnowClan, but other than that, she had not learned too much.

"It is not everyday I meet NightClan members," she purred. "But tell me, this is an ambush, isn't it?" she said, eyeing the guards.

"No, Hazelstar, I assure you it isn't," Rabbitfur explained. As she looked closer, she noticed how thin they looked, probably from lack of prey. Their pelts were filthy as well.

"Mmhmm," she said, eyeing the two. "How long since you've been exiled?"

"Fifteen sunrises," Deerheart said, looking down at his paws.

"And where have you been since then?"

"We tried to head into BirdClan territory, but they drove us out. We headed down by FoxClan, but again, they attacked us for stealing prey. We even went to the twoleg houses before eventually deciding we'd be better off if we joined MoonClan."

"I run a clan, not a homeless shelter!" she spat.

"But we aren't asking for food. We want to join!" Deerheart argued.

"And why is that? How do I know you won't run back to your old clan and fight with them in battle?"

"Perhaps it's best if I take it from here, son," Rabbitfur told Deerheart.

"I grew up in NightClan," Rabbitfur explained.

"Oh, no, not an autobiography," Hazelstar rolled her eyes.

"Please, let me continue. It's the only way," Rabbitfur argued.

"Very well. But we should at least get comfortable. My

guards will escort you down to my den," she said.

"If you say so, Hazelstar," Rabbitfur said.

Hazelstar led the way, the two guards standing by the two former NightClan cats. As they made their way down to the clan, Hazelstar could hear the distant moaning of Chesnuttail who was probably in more pain than he had ever been. Hopefully some cat was fixing him up so he wouldn't die before battle.

"What's that noise?" Deerheart asked.

"Captives, that sort of thing," Hazelstar explained. "But ignore them. Into my den, please," she said, leading the way.

"Guards, stay out," she ordered.

They nodded, standing on the outside of the den.

"Get comfortable. Sit," Hazelstar instructed, watching as the father and son sat next to each other.

The two nodded and sat down. Rabbitfur opened his mouth, ready to begin his tale.

"Like I said, I was born in NightClan, just myself, no siblings. I was in love with a beautiful ginger she-cat, Appleclaw, though at the time she was Applepaw. I loved her so much, but she would constantly ignore me, turn away, like I was a piece of bad prey. She fell in love with the deputy of NightClan, Ashclaw, though he was Ashpaw at the time. It broke my heart into pieces, and I swore my revenge one day to her, not that she would care.

"Later, I found out her sister, Acorntail, or Acornpaw, was in love with me, and although I first thought of her as annoying, we grew in love. She had four kits- all brown furred like herself. We had three sons and one daughter, all good warriors.

"But I still swore my revenge on Appleclaw, and seeing her with her four kits shattered my heart. The prettiest of all, or the daughter she favored the most, was Cherryfur. Every cat adored that she-cat in the clan. She had a gray calico pelt, and I swore, one

day, she'd be leader.

"Cherryfur had a mate, Oakpool, and soon, she began expecting kits. It was time to begin my revenge...When Cherryfur went into labor, I planned to kill her kits, and perhaps her as well. I snuck into the den, ready to kill them, but Cherryfur guarded her three kits with her body, and I ended up killing her instead, not the kits. Her brother came in to attack me, but it was easy to fight him off. Her mate ended up weakening me, but by the time they came to Cherryfur's side, she was dead.

"Cats looked at me in shock. They were shocked that such a great warrior had killed a clanmate and left three kits motherless. My own mate looked at me as if I were a monster. I was exiled, of course, and I begged my family to come with me. My mate refused and told she didn't love me anymore. My sons and daughter decided not to come. Only Deerheart, my loyal son, came."

Hazelstar nodded. This cat was evil all right. She had never thought of revenge to be so painful that way. Perhaps she would learn lessons from the tom.

"Very well. I believe you, Rabbitfur. And, I'm willing to make you members of MoonClan."

Deerheart cheered, and Rabbitfur nodded.

"Thank you, Hazelstar."

"But," she began. "I don't trust you completely. Two nights in the captive den, and we'll see how you do. Then, we'll make you members."

"Thank you, Hazelstar. You don't know how much this means to us," he explained, smiling.

"You're very welcome. Now, into the den. Try not to talk too much to my stupid FoxClan captives. They're idiots," she laughed, watching as the two were led off.

As they waved good-bye, Hazelstar curled into her nest, glad things were starting to go well.

The sun rose on the second day of Rabbitfur and Deerheart's day in the captive den, and so far, they'd been doing well. As long as everything went well into the evening, things would be going smoothly, and she'd have two more members.

Hazelstar sat in the center of the camp, chewing away at a fresh squirrel. Chesnuttail had been healing, and she hoped he could fight in battle. She didn't want to kill her captives. No, she would keep them alive so they could watch as their clanmates looked in shock as they betrayed them. Just the thought made her grin.

A yowling noise made Hazelstar jumped, and she turned, watching the guards she had sent off were returning to camp, Jetfur and Tigerstripe squirming in their grip.

Hazelstar's eyes widened, and she let out a pleasant smile.

"BROTHER!" she exclaimed.

The injured Tigerstripe looked up, his eyes weary with exhaustion. "Sister," he growled, squirming even more. "WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?!"

"I had thought you were a true MoonClan cat," Hazelstar whimpered. "But I was wrong. You're nothing but a softy now."

"She's messing with you, Tigerstripe," Jetfur argued.

"Oh, who's this?" Hazelstar asked. "Is it not the childish she-cat who left MoonClan running with my little brother."

"I'm not little!" Tigerstripe argued.

And he was right. He was larger than Hazelstar and Chesnuttail. He was larger than Leopardtail when she was alive at the time, but he was tired, and he could not escape the grip of the guards.

"Leave Jetfur alone!" Tigerstripe snapped as Hazelstar touched Jetfur's small face with her tail.

"Oh, I didn't know she was special to you," Hazelstar admitted.

"Don't egg her on, Tigerstripe," Jetfur argued.

Jetfur let out a yowl as Hazelstar brought a claw down her cheek.

"STOP IT!" Tigerstripe hissed.

"Throw them into the captive den with the others. And to you, my brother," Hazelstar purred.

Tigerstripe looked up at Hazelstar, his eyes widened with fear.

"I trust you will fight for MoonClan."

"Never," he growled.

"Wrong answer," she said, swiping him on the head. He fell unconscious, and the guards carried him off as well as the wailing Jetfur, shoving them into the captive den. At last, the plan was all coming together...

Chapter 19

Hazelstar jolted awake as an ear-screeching yowl rang through the camp. At first she assumed it was Jetfur, perhaps another captive, crying out from pain or perhaps sorrow. But this mew was too familiar, and Hazelstar immediately recognized it.

Screechshade.

She should've known her kits would be arriving any day.

Hazelstar stood up and padded outside, the morning sun slowly rising. She watched Fang dart across the camp, rushing to his mate's side while Hazelstar sat by the fresh kill pile, picking through pieces of prey.

"Hazelstar," Fire called.

Hazelstar turned, noticing her deputy approaching.

"What?"

"Screechshade's kits are arriving," he informed her.

"I know that!" Hazelstar snapped. "I heard the yowl. I am guessing Snowflake is by her side, correct?"

Fire nodded.

"Then she is fine," Hazelstar assured him. "Let me eat my breakfast in peace, and I'll visit soon."

"Very well, Hazelstar," Fire sighed, bowing and padding away.

Hazelstar ate a plump squirrel slowly, watching as the others began to perform their duties, occasionally glancing at the nursery.

By the time Hazelstar had finished eating, she heard tiny mews coming from the nursery, and she assumed Screechshade's kits had born.

Hazelstar rose to her feet, padding across the camp into the nursery. She was not surprised to find Screechshade lying near the side of the den with two kits suckling at her belly.

Both were brown toms, though one was a shade lighter than the other.

"I see the kits have been born," Hazelstar observed.

Fang nodded. "Aren't they beautiful?"

"Oh, yes, fabulous," Hazelstar exclaimed sarcastically. "Have you named them yet?"

Screechshade nodded slowly.

"The darker one is Serpentkit, and the lighter one is Lionkit."

"Well, I'm sure they will prove valuable," Hazelstar explained. "And your kits too, Snowflake."

The white she-cat turned, watching her three kits cower near the corner of the den. They were not too young to understand that Hazelstar had supreme power.

"Well, Fang, return to your duties. I've got some meetings to take care of," Hazelstar explained, issuing a farewell.

She padded outside her den, heading towards the captive den. The guards stood firm, their eyes wide awake, not drooping like they previously had been.

"Everything all right with the prisoners?" she asked.

One of the guards nodded his head.

"We were able to silence the she-cat's wailing over your

brother very quickly. Rabbitfur and Deerheart have done well," he explained.

"Perfect," Hazelstar purred. "I require those two, as well as my brother and his mate."

"Certainly," a ginger she-cat said. "We'll bring them over to the rock in a matter of seconds."

Hazelstar nodded and raced across the camp towards her rock. Only she ever sat there, unless she was appointing apprentices or warriors, of course. In a matter of seconds, Rabbitfur and Deerheart were escorted to the rock, as well as Tigerstripe and Jetfur, both of them coated in dried blood.

"MOONCLAN! I REQUIRE YOUR ATTENTION!" Hazelstar yowled.

Cats quickly gathered near the rock, waiting for her curious announcement.

"Deerheart, Rabbitfur," she motioned.

The father and son padded up the rock, standing beside Hazelstar.

"As many of you know, we took in two NightClan exiles a few sunrises ago. After testing them, they have proven themselves loyal to MoonClan. Now, I will appoint them full MoonClan members!"

The MoonClan cats cheered, glad to have more fighting at their side.

"Rabbitfur, do you promise to dedicate your life to MoonClan, even if it means going against your former clan and kin?"

"I do, Hazelstar," Rabbitfur dipped his head.

"And will you worship the Dark Forest and fight valiantly in battle, even at the cost of your own life?"

"Yes, Hazelstar," Rabbitfur repeated.

"Then Rabbitfur, I pronounce you a full member of MoonClan!" she yowled.

Cats yowled, cheering, "RABBITFUR! RABBITFUR!"

"Deerheart," Hazelstar said.

Rabbitfur's son looked a bit anxious, and he gulped as he stood next to Hazelstar.

"Deerheart," she began. "Do *you* promise to dedicate your life to MoonClan, even if it means going against your former clan and kin?"

"I-I do," he stammered.

"And will you, Deerheart, worship the Dark Forest and fight valiantly in battle, even at the cost of your own life?"

"Yes, I will," he said, a bit more confident this time.

"Then I too pronounce you a full member of MoonClan."

"DEERHEART! DEERHEART!" the clan cried.

Hazelstar turned to the MoonClan warriors now, the crowd falling silent.

"Though these two were strangers only a few sunrises ago, you are all required to treat them with the upmost respect as you treat your other clanmates! Understood?"

Slowly, cats nodded.

Hazelstar smiled. "Good. I require Tigerstripe and Jetfur now."

"No!" Tigerstripe shouted, struggling as he and Jetfur were hauled up onto the rock. Two guards stood by them, making sure they did not leave.

"You're insane, sister!" Tigerstripe spat.

"I'm insane, brother? I left this very camp at six moons while you basked in its glory. And now when you have a chance to reclaim your warriorship, you turn it down? I am being nothing but generous, dear brother."

"Oh, hush!" Jetfur spat.

Hazelstar focused her eyes on Jetfur. "I must say, I didn't expect you to bring this puny she-cat back, brother. She's much too small. We all know she was a coward in battle."

"Leave her alone!"

"Oh, very well, my fun is over," she said. "But still, you two will fight for MoonClan in battle."

"Never," Tigerstripe growled.

"Then the powers of Moonstar and the Dark Forest will come upon you," Hazelstar told him.

"Then let them," he replied.

Hazelstar ignored his comment and turned to the MoonClan members. "Many of you may remember your fellow clanmate, Tigerstripe, correct?"

Heads nodded.

"A great warrior who was sure to be loyal to MoonClan forever. Oh, what a great plot twist this is. He has returned with his so called "mate", Jetfur, whom I'm sure many of you remember. Now, they will be captives still, of course, unless they perhaps have a change of mind."

"This is ridiculous," Tigerstripe groaned.

"I'm giving you a chance here, brother."

"No," he repeated.

"Very well. There will be a slight change in arrangements. Bone, could you please step forward."

Hazelstar watched as her brother's eyes widened. It wasn't everyday you were able to reunite with your old mentor.

"Bone, you were Tigerstripe's former mentor, correct?"

"Yes, Hazelstar. I trained him many moons ago," the white tom explained.

"Then you shall reteach him and Jetfur as well."

"But I am already training Chesnuttail and Cloudfoot," he argued.

"Not any longer. From now on, you shall train Tigerstripe and Jetfur. Go, brother. Touch noses to your mentor like the good ol' days," she joked, pushing Tigerstripe forward.

Tigerstripe stumbled, falling in front of Bone. The tom laughed, and she watched as Tigerstripe growled. He did not often find himself humiliated, she supposed.

"Touch noses, then," Hazelstar repeated.

Tigerstripe stepped forward to touch noses with his mentor, only to receive a slash down his right cheek.

"Welcome back to training, Tiger*paw*," Bone sneered.

"Deerheart, Rabbitfur!" Hazelstar snapped.

The two focused their attention on her.

"You two will take over Chesnuttail and Cloudfoot's training. Don't let them manipulate you. I trust both of you."

"I shall teach them well, Hazelstar," Rabbitfur purred.

"StarClan will destroy you!" Jetfur spat.

"StarClan is nothing to me anymore," Hazelstar growled,

watching as they were taken away into the woods.

And it was true. StarClan had done nothing for her. It had only caused more grief, more heartache. The Dark Forest gave her power, which was something she supposed she always craved.

As the clan padded away, Hazelstar felt a surge of energy, and suddenly, a gasp came from Tigerstripe.

"Your eyes..." She could hear him whisper.

Hazelstar tilted her head, looking at her reflecting in a nearby puddle. They were the green eyes she had been born with, though something was different. It only a lasted a second or two, but her eyes had flashed a blood red, just like Moonstar's...

Chapter 20

Hazelstar awoke earlier in the morning for inspection. There had been no escape attempts, though she still wanted to see the progress of the captives.

"Fire!" she snapped.

The tom ran towards her, as he always did. He bowed quickly before waiting for her to give him a command.

"I need to inspect the warriors," she growled.

"They're just about to leave, Hazelstar," Fire explained. "How can I be of assistance?"

"While I inspect, someone must be watching over the cats, correct?"

"Yes, Hazelstar," Fire agreed.

"Then do so!"

"Yes, Hazelstar," Fire stammered, heading off to perform his duties.

Hazelstar growled, watching as cats headed off into the forest for training. She hadn't seen the mentors training their apprentices, and now was the perfect opportunity.

She headed into the woods, keeping her eyes open for cats training nearby. She had made no announcement that she was inspecting, so it would be a perfect opportunity to watch her clanmates.

As Hazelstar continued to pad through the plentiful woods, she paused, hearing the sound of cats nearby. She pricked her ears and sniffed the air. There were definitely some MoonClan members nearby.

She slowly crept in the direction of the sound, watching as she came towards a clearing. Shard stood with Rainwhisker, Treestep, and Chesnutfang. He frowned at the three and hissed at them, telling them to continue to practice.

Hazelstar crept out of the shadows, making Chesnutfang gasp.

Shard turned his head and nearly had the same reaction as Chesnutfang.

"Hazelstar! I had not expected you!" Shard gasped.

"No cat ever does," she laughed. "I'm here to check on how mentoring is going."

"It would go better if these three learned how to fight properly," Shard growled.

"Oh, they'll learn," Hazelstar murmured as she passed by Treestep. She flicked her tail by his throat, laughing a little.

She turned back to Shard who watched her with curiousity.

"May I watch?" she asked.

"Of course," Shard said, though he did not seem too pleased with her spectating. Hazelstar sat down, watching the four.

"Well, go!" she commanded.

Shard nodded. "Yes, well, we're practicing killing blows. Treestep, would you like to present what you've learned?"

"No," Treestep growled.

"Don't you want to make your mother proud?" Shard asked, unsheathing his claws.

"No," he growled once again.

"Do as I say!" Shard commanded.

"Oh, leave him be, Shard," Hazelstar interrupted. "Stubborn, isn't he?"

Treestep eyed his mother with suspicion.

Hazelstar padded by her son and grinned. "Now, my little flower, it is a bit rude to ignore an instructor, isn't it?"

"Shard is not my instructor," Treestep growled.

"Denial, huh?" Hazelstar asked. "Oh, but Treestep, it would be a shame to die before the battle. Could you imagine if something tragic happened to your mate...or kits?"

Treestep gulped.

"What are you playing at, Hazelstar?" he growled.

"Perform the move on Rainwhisker!" she spat.

Rainwhisker's eyes widened in fear.

"Oh, he won't kill you!" Hazelstar laughed. "But it'll hurt. Do it now, Treestep!"

Treestep took a step forward and sighed. She watched as he looked into Rainwhisker's eyes and murmured, "sorry".

He leapt at Rainwhisker. Rainwhisker, who had not received too much warrior training since he was a former medicine cat, tried to leap to the side. He was unsuccessful, and he let out a yowl as Treestep hit him in the side. Though his claws were sheathed, Rainwhisker lay sprawled out on the ground, moaning.

"I thought we weren't allowed to harm clan members!" Chesnutfang spat.

Treestep ran to Rainwhisker's side, though Hazelstar ignored Chesnutfang's question.

"Keep on trying there, Shard."

"I-I will, Hazelstar," he stammered.

Hazelstar padded off farther into the woods, watching for more groups of cats to inspect. Very soon after, she noticed Peach with her apprentice, Crow. Unlike the captive cats, Crow actually seemed to be listening to his mentor.

"Greetings!" Hazelstar called as she came towards them.

Peach turned, a look of worry on her face. It quickly faded and transformed into a smile.

"Hazelstar, nice to see you here," Peach greeted.

"I'm just inspecting mentors to make sure training is going well. How is Crow's training coming along?"

Peach turned to look at her apprentice.

"He's small, but yes, it's coming along well. Crow, show Hazelstar that attack move," she instructed.

Crow nodded excitedly and backed up, facing Peach. Peach stood, growling as Crow leapt towards her. She moved away, though he swiped a paw from under her, causing her to fall. Swiftly, Crow slid towards the other side of her as she stood up. Quickly, he dove underneath his mentor and knocked her off her feet. He placed his paw near her throat, though his claws were sheathed. If they were not, he would've killed her instantly.

"Very good tactic," Hazelstar observed. "You'll make a fine warrior, Crow."

"You think so?" he asked excitedly.

"Oh, I do believe so. Keep up the good work, Peach," Hazelstar purred.

Peach nodded excitedly, and Hazelstar disappeared back into the woods to inspect how the other mentors were doing.

She climbed up a nearby tree, deciding it was easier to

climb from tree to tree instead of walking along the ground. Plus, she'd have a better view of the ground below her.

Hazelstar spent awhile leaping from branch to branch, though soon, she spotted Berry near the river with Brownpaw and Violetpaw.

Hazelstar leapt down onto the ground, listening to the distant sound of the river. She followed it, coming towards the practicing apprentices. Berry stood observing them, shouting out suggestions every once in awhile.

"Hazelstar!" Violetpaw gasped. The white she-cat knelt to her feet, and Brownpaw did the same. Berry turned and gasped, falling to her knees as well.

"Such loyal clanmates," Hazelstar purred. "Get up, you three. I'm only here to watch training."

"I didn't know you would be," Berry admitted.

"Is there something you are hiding?" Hazelstar asked.

"No, Hazelstar," Berry replied.

"Then show me their training skills!" she hissed.

"Of course, Hazelstar," Berry nodded. "Violetpaw, Brownpaw, do the death kill."

The two nodded, facing each other.

Violetpaw was much tinier than Brownpaw, and Hazelstar could already guess the brown she-cat would win. Perhaps Brownpaw was just like Hazelstar-strong and fierce. They did look similar.

"Charge!" Berry yowled.

Violetpaw fled towards Brownpaw, immediately swiping at her feet. This surprised Hazelstar. She had not expected the smaller she-cat to make the first move.

Brownpaw recovered quickly though and knocked Violetpaw over, sending her into a pile of fallen leaves. Violetpaw groaned but stood back up, growling at Brownpaw. She raced towards the she-cat, only to be pinned down by Brownpaw.

"GO IN FOR THE MOVE!" Berry shouted.

Brownpaw held up her sheathed paw and brought it down, though it didn't do any damage. Hazelstar nodded in approval. This she-cat could kill easily in battle.

"Very well done, Brownpaw," Hazelstar nodded at the she-cat. "Violetpaw, you are fast. You must use this speed to dodge enemies. Don't charge at them."

Violetpaw nodded her head up and down. It seemed she was just relieved that Hazelstar wasn't going to kill her.

"It seems they're behaving well, Berry," Hazelstar observed. "Good job. Now, if you excuse me, I must go find Bone."

"He's by the hillside," Berry told Hazelstar. "I've heard Tigerstripe and Jetfur are not behaving well."

"Oh, it'll be simple to change that," Hazelstar said. "Farewell. See you back at camp."

She closed herself back into the darkness of the forest and headed towards the hillside. Already, she could hear Bone's shouting and yowls and cries coming from the side.

A trail of blood led to the hillside, probably from either Tigerstripe of Jetfur. Hazelstar paused, watching as Bone instructed the two.

"A kit could do this move!" he spat at Tigerstripe. "I taught you all you needed to know! Has your memory been erased in the past moons."

"I've chosen to forget them!" Tigerstripe growled.

"But I was your mentor, see?" Bone challenged. "I planted

them into your head. You can't forget the moves I've taught you. Surely you remember that day you killed the fox with those moves. Your mother was so proud."

"I won't do the move," Tigerstripe hissed.

"Fine," Bone growled, swiping at his cheek. Tigerstripe's pelt was already coated in dried blood, and it looked as if he were about to pass out from exhaustion.

Bone turned to Jetfur instead and grinned maliciously.

"Perform the move on him," he growled.

"No," Jetfur hissed. "Go back where you came from!"

"I don't like your attitude," Bone hissed. "I knew I should've killed you moons ago. Moonstar should've done it herself, yet she didn't. You haven't done anything for MoonClan unlike your mate."

"Leave her alone! No one is dying!" Tigerstripe spat.

"Oh?"

Bone moved towards Jetfur slowly.

"Don't you dare touch a hair on her pelt," Tigerstripe warned.

Bone unsheathed his claws and held them towards Jetfur's head.

"I'm warning you, Bone!" Tigerstripe growled. He was obviously getting angrier as Bone grew closer towards her.

Bone brought down his paw on Jetfur's head, pushing her to the ground. She cried out in pain. Tigerstripe flared up, and immediately, he sprang at Bone, yowling at the tom.

Hazelstar was amazed by her brother's moves. He obviously had not forgotten the MoonClan battle moves because he seemed to be performing all of them. Bone yowled in pain, though he fought

back.

"You can't attack your own mentor!" he spat.

"You're not my mentor!" Tigerstripe shouted.

Tigerstripe pinned the tom down and held out his claws, as if he were about to kill the tom.

"Congratulations. You performed the move," Bone smiled.

Tigerstripe turned to look at Jetfur, then he looked back at Bone. He growled at the tom, then gasped as Bone pushed him away.

"I say we get back to training," Bone laughed.

Hazelstar looked one last time before padding away. For some reason, the situation had been uncomfortable, and she wasn't sure why. Did she want her brother to turn back into a MoonClan tom? Then he'd be a better warrior than her.

Hazelstar shook her head. No, Bone was doing an excellent job at teaching, even if it meant her brother and his mate would die soon.

Chapter 21

"TRY THAT MOVE AGAIN!" Hazelstar shouted at the three apprentices who sat whimpering.

Fang sat in the distance, watching the three toms curiously.

"Listen to Hazelstar," he growled.

Hazelstar had been attending more and more training sessions, keeping a watchful eye on the captives and apprentices.

"Go on!" Hazelstar shouted.

Blackpaw cautiously moved forward and leapt at Shadepaw, knocking the small black apprentice off his feet. Copperpaw stood to the side, frowning at Blackpaw's move.

"Don't just stand there, Copperpaw!" Fang shouted. "Your brother is working. Why aren't you?"

"Sorry, Fang," Copperpaw whimpered, turning towards Shadepaw who licked a few scratches on his pelt.

"Oh, leave Shadepaw be," Hazelstar explained. "It's no fair that he's the smallest out of all of you. Fight your brother, Copperpaw."

Copperpaw took in a deep breath. "No."

Hazelstar lurched forward and pinned the ginger tom down.

"What did you say?"

Copperpaw's lip quivered. "I-I said 'no,' Hazelstar. I won't do it."

"You're trying to be quite the hero, aren't you?" Hazelstar hissed. "This is the first time an apprentice has stood up to me. You have the same strong will as your father."

Copperpaw didn't move. He only laid under Hazelstar's grip, quivering.

"I wouldn't want to see an apprentice killed so young. Don't you agree, Copperpaw? Attack your brother."

"No!" he shouted again.

Hazelstar sunk her claws into his stomach, causing him to cry out in pain.

"I won't waste my time on you," she muttered, releasing her grip. She turned to Fang.

"Teach this apprentice some manners. I'll check back later," she growled, rushing off.

As she looked behind her, she watched as Copperpaw backed away from his screeching mentor in fear.

For a moment, and only a moment, Hazelstar emphasized with the apprentice.

"He must learn as I did," she muttered, running off to the next group she would check on.

Passing the spring and large pine tree, Hazelstar could spot Bloodfur by a nearby stump with the three she-cats.

Hazelstar watched as an exhausted Rosecloud made her way towards Lavenderwhisker who leaped over her.

"Don't tease her!" Bloodfur shouted. "Attack her, Lavenderwhisker!"

Hollybreeze was collapsed on the ground, panting heavily as a pile of blood swarmed around her.

"Good morning!" Hazelstar called as she padded towards the group of cats.

"Hazelstar, you've caught us right in the middle of a lesson," Bloodfur spoke. "I-I assume you're here to watch."

"Well, yes," Hazelstar laughed. Bloodfur laughed nervously by her as she glanced at the three she-cats.

"Bloodfur, why is Hollybreeze not practicing?" Hazelstar asked.

Bloodfur gulped. "She's collapsed from exhaustion, Hazelstar. I was afraid she might die if she continued training."

"Ah, she's fine," Hazelstar observed.

One of Hollybreeze's green eyes turned to look at her.

"Get up, she-cat!" she growled, shoving Hollybreeze.

The she-cat groaned in response but did not move.

"Move, you filthy FoxClan cat!" Hazelstar shouted, grabbing her by the scruff and tossing her.

Hollybreeze yowled and slowly rose to her feet.

"Leave my mother alone," Rosecloud spat at Hazelstar.

"Ah, yes, you're the mate of my son," Hazelstar laughed, tracing her tail underneath the calico's chin.

"You've hurt everyone close to me. You're getting nowhere with this plan," Rosecloud growled.

The others stood to the side as Hazelstar fixed her gaze on Rosecloud.

"You're as stubborn as my brother," Hazelstar rolled her eyes. "You think you're so brave, she-cat. I just required your sons to duel, your mother is in a state of injury, and I can't wait for what's in store for others in your family."

"Leave my family alone!" Rosecloud spat.

"You act like your maternal instincts are superior to everyone else's. No one here can be a hero, Rosecloud. You came save your kits, or her kits," she said, pointing to Lavenderwhisker. "You can't even

save your pathetic mother. Tell me, do you honestly believe these cats will survive battle?"

"I fought one before," Hollybreeze croaked. "I can fight another."

"But these two haven't," Hazelstar laughed, pointing at Rosecloud and Lavenderwhisker. "They were born after the battle, obviously."

"I don't recall you fighting, Hazelstar," Hollybreeze spoke up.

Hazelstar focused on the black she-cat and marched towards her.

"I'd watch your words, Hollybreeze. You'll end up dead like the rest of them," Hazelstar growled.

"That's enough!" Bloodfur shrieked. "I'm sorry my apprentices have terrible manners, Hazelstar. Let's get back to our lesson."

"Why not let me teach the lesson for the day, Bloodfur?" Hazelstar asked.

"Hazelstar, you must remember these cats are needed for battle. It will be quite a spectacle to see them fighting against their own kind. Have you checked with Deerheart and Rabbitfur?"

"No, I have not," Hazelstar growled. "I will leave you for now," Hazelstar hissed at the captives. "Keep them in line, Bloodfur."

With those words, Hazelstar raced off through the woods. It was as if her own clanmates were turning against her, trying to fight her own battles.

"I'll teach them respect later," she murmured, spotting Deerheart and Rabbitfur with Chesnuttail and Cloudfoot up on a grassy hill.

"Good, good!" Rabbitfur's voice echoed as the toms circled each other.

Hazelstar padded up the hill towards the father and son.

At the sight of Hazelstar, Deerheart called off the two and turned towards Hazelstar.

"How may we help you, Hazelstar?" Rabbitfur asked.

"I'm only here to see how training is going."

"It's going well," Deerheart reported.

"That's a relief. I've argued with every cat today," Hazelstar murmured, watching as Cloudfoot and Chesnuttail awkwardly stood by the two mentors.

"Is my brother behaving?" Hazelstar asked.

"He struggled earlier this morning, but we whipped him into shape," Rabbitfur explained.

Hazelstar turned back to look at her brother, noticing some claw marks down his leg.

"Very well. Keep up the good work. I'll be on my way," Hazelstar grinned. "Let me know if you have any troubles."

"We will!" Rabbitfur waved as she ran off.

Chapter 22

Hazelstar marched through the MoonClan camp towards the nursery. As the battle drew nearer, she realized they were in desperate need of more warriors, and it was time for the kits of Snowflake and Screechshade to become apprentices, even if they were barely three moons.

Chatter echoed from the nursery, though as Hazelstar came closer, the den became incredibly silent, as if she had sucked all the chatter from the room.

Hazelstar took a step in, watching as Snowflake and Screechshade looked up at her. Shard stood next to Snowflake, nearly shaking with terror.

"Shard, could you tell me why you're not busy at the moment?" Hazelstar asked, turning towards the gray tabby.

Shard gulped, then began to speak.

"I was only visiting my mate and kits before patrol, Hazelstar. You understand, don't you?" he whimpered.

"No, Shard, I do not understand," Hazelstar growled, beginning to circle around the tom. "When I ask you to do a job, you do it. I did not command you to visit your mate and kits. Snowflake can raise them herself. She doesn't need your assistance."

"B-but," Shard began to argue, only to feel a piercing pain in his side as Hazelstar shoved her claw into him.

Shard held a straight face, though Hazelstar could see the pain in his eyes.

"Please, go and do your duties," she whispered. "And if I catch you here again, I can't say that your mate and kits will stay

safe."

Shard nodded vigorously and raced out of the den, leaving the others shocked.

"Um, Hazelstar, it's nice to see you," Snowflake said.

"Yes, yes, it's nice to see you, too," Hazelstar growled, refusing to make eye contact with the she-cat.

"Can we help you?" Screechshade asked.

"Yes, actually, you'll be much of assistance. I require your kits."

"Excuse me?" Snowflake asked.

Hazelstar turned and glared at the white she-cat. "Your kits are around three moons, are they not?"

"I-I suppose so," Snowflake stammered.

"And didn't we agree they'd train around this time?"

"My kits are barely three moons," Screechshade argued.

"The battle approaches, and warriors are needed. That is why I require them. Today, they will be made apprentices!"

"No, I will not allow it!" Snowflake growled, standing up.

"I'm sorry. What was that?" Hazelstar asked, taking a step closer to the she-cat. Her kits hid behind their mother, shaking.

"You boss this entire clan around, you injure those like they mean nothing to you! These kits aren't needed for battle! We have plenty of rogues!"

"Snowflake," Screechshade warned.

"No! I'm sick of being bossed around by this she-cat. You should be too, Screechshade! Do you not see the evil she possesses?! Isn't this all silly to you as well?!" Snowflake growled.

"I have served MoonClan for a long time," Screechshade said at last. "It is to this clan that I am most loyal."

Snowflake froze, causing Hazelstar to erupt in laughter.

"I always knew you'd be the one to crack eventually. You're weak, just like your pathetic father. He was a wimp as well. You believe you can take me down, but know this, little she-cat, I practically own you now. Try to escape, try to leave, my guards will be after you. I am close to many cats in this forest who will gladly kill you. You're lucky that I will not kill you this time."

Snowflake paused, about to sigh in relief, when Hazelstar leapt at the white she-cat, pinning her against the clan wall. Screechshade quickly moved the crying kits away as Hazelstar sunk her claws into Snowflake's chest, causing her to cry out in pain.

"No, please, not in front of the kits," Snowflake whispered through pain.

"The kits will witness this shortly when they battle," she laughed, knocking Snowflake against the wall. Blood streamed down, and a pool began to form around her.

Snowflake struggled to her feet but fell, moaning in pain. Hazelstar sliced at her pelt, wailing and moaning as her kits stood, frozen.

"That's enough, Hazelstar!" Screechshade said at last.

Hazelstar turned, facing the brown she-cat.

"Why? Would you like to end up like her, too?" Hazelstar offered.

"No, but if you continue, she'll die."

"I suppose," Hazelstar frowned. "It's a good thing we are holding a medicine cat captive," she said, glancing at the crumbled body of Snowflake.

Hazelstar padded out of the den, calling for Fire. Within a

minute, the ginger tom was at her side.

"Take this injured she-cat to that empty den, and get Rainwhisker. Let him heal her. She'll probably be well again by the time of the battle."

"But we'll be one less on patrols," Fire argued. "Don't you think it was a bit stupid to severely injure a warrior?"

"She'll be better by battle!" Hazelstar hissed. "Now take her! And don't allow her mate to visit if he wants the same fate!"

Fire nodded and grabbed the injured she-cat by the scruff. Her white pelt was now red with blood, and she moaned as he pulled her across the camp.

Hazelstar took a step forward towards Screechshade's kits and Snowflake's kits.

"It's time to make you apprentices," she purred.

Hazelstar stood with the five kits in the center of the camp, waiting as the camp gathered to hear her message. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see the incredibly weak Snowflake peek out, trying to see her kits.

"CATS OF MOONCLAN! TODAY, OUR CLAN GROWS STRONGER!" Hazelstar yowled.

Cats erupted in a roar, praising Hazelstar and the cats that stood before her.

"Now that Snowflake and Screechshade's kits are an approppriate age to start training, today, we will make them apprentices!"

Another roar of cheer.

"First, I would like to invite Snowflake's litter forward," Hazelstar purred, watching as the three kits slowly made their way towards their leader. Wolfkit, the white tom, glared at her.

"Don't be too unhappy about your mother," she whispered. "What if the same thing happened to your father?"

His glare vanished.

"Today, I present to you these three wonderful kits—Wolfkit, Arctickit, and Graykit!" she yowled.

The cats yowled again.

"Wolfkit," she began, turning to face the white tom. His eyes were green, like his father's, but he reminded Hazelstar of Bone.

"From this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Wolfpaw!" she yowled. She scowered the crowd, looking for a suitable mentor. Most cats were mentoring by now, but she wanted the best for them.

"Crystal!" she yowled, watching as the white she-cat came forward.

"Hazelstar, I can't mentor him. I'm busy with the rogues," she argued.

"I understand. I need you to find a group of suitable rogues that will mentor. Get the best ones you have!"

"I-I will," Crystal nodded, running off.

"Screechshade," Hazelstar called the brown tabby forward. "You will mentor Wolfpaw."

"It will be an honor, Hazelstar," Screechshade nodded, rushing forward to touch noses with the white tom.

As the others soon began to receive their apprentice names, Hazelstar began giving out rogues as mentors, watching as the kits awkwardly touched noses with the cats they barely knew.

With the last kit, Serpentpaw, Hazelstar was exhausted and glad that there were no more kits she'd have to pair up with mentors.

The ceremony soon ended, followed by arguing with Shard and Snowflake's kits about visiting Snowflake. Hazelstar won that argument, of course, making sure that they went off training instead of sneaking off to the medicine cat den.

As evening soon fell later that day, Hazelstar sat in her den, thinking of battle strategies in her head. The sound of footsteps made her spin around.

Crystal stood in front of her, an awkward grin on her face.

"Mind if I come in?" she asked.

"No," Hazelstar growled, scooting over. For some reason, she was jealous of the she-cat's beauty, something she never possessed.

I had a cat I loved and a kit, Hazelstar thought. But she had lost them long ago, hadn't she?

"What is it you want?" she growled.

"I just needed to tell you something," Crystal said nervously.

"And what is that?" Hazelstar asked.

"I'm expecting Fire's kits..."

Chapter 23

"You stupid she-cat!" Hazelstar spat, knocking Crystal over onto the floor of her den.

"What?! What's wrong?!" Crystal cried out.

"We're getting closer to the battle, and I need every single one of my warriors. It's not your job to mess with my plans and get pregnant along the way!" Hazelstar hissed, unsheathing her claws.

"I can still handle the rogues!" Crystal hissed.

"Yes, but when will your kits be due? Right at the battle, I presume. You've got guts, going against me, strategically avoiding battle to save your own skin," Hazelstar hissed.

"Fine! I can just leave if you want me too!" Crystal hissed back. "Then who will run the rogues?"

"RUN THE ROGUES! KEEP THEM IN LINE!" Hazelstar hissed back. "But...this isn't the end of this, Crystal. I would kill you now, but who else will get the rogues to cooperate. We'll talk after the battle."

Crystal nodded slowly, her eyes clouded with fear.

"What's going on?!" came Fire's growl as he raced into the den.

"FIRE, LEAVE!" Hazelstar hissed.

"What are you doing to her?!" Fire gasped.

"FIRE, LEAVE!" Hazelstar repeated.

Fire did not move.

"Walk out of this den now or she dies!" Hazelstar hissed.

Fire obeyed her.

Hazelstar slowly let Crystal up, pushing her out of the den.

"You better work hard!" she spat as Crystal ran off.

"Stupid she-cat," Hazelstar muttered to herself, leaning against the wall of her den. How dare her warriors think they can go against her?

I bet Crystal would've never said those things to Moonstar, Hazelstar thought. Her cursed mother, a real leader. How could she ever learn from her malicious mother?

Flashbacks crossed Hazelstar's mind as she remembered her mother's claws coming down on her, the scratches that burned across her pelt. They were faint memories, ones from when she was just a little kit. Maybe they weren't even real.

But of course they were. Hazelstar knew they were. Her mother had been abusive, cruel. That's why she and Chesnuttail had left in the first place.

But why had she returned? Some days, Hazelstar wasn't sure. Other days, she knew this was her path. Her mother had guided her down this path to lead MoonClan to victory. But what was in it for her? Sure, she got the entire forest, but that was it. There was nothing else that really excited her.

"My warriors will fear me!" she declared, stomping around her den. Wasn't fear the greatest reward of all? To be feared meant Hazelstar was powerful, just like her mother.

"Hazelstar?" called Fire.

"What?!" she snapped, her eyes wide. She was tired and sleep-deprived from nights where she tossed and turned. Some days, she thought she was losing it altogether.

"What will you do to Crystal?" he asked.

"The she-cat has my protection, so quit fussing," Hazelstar growled. "You're lucky I let her live. If it weren't for her dedication and leadership over the rogues, I would've killed her on the spot."

"She didn't mean any harm," Fire proposed.

"Don't argue for her!" Hazelstar spat. "If you were a good deputy, you wouldn't have gotten a mate in the first place. Your duties lie with me now, you hear? I don't want to see you anywhere near that she-cat until the kits are born."

"But—" Fire began.

"But nothing! You are deputy. You pledged yourself to Moonstar and the Dark Forest. They want us to lead, to take over. Crystal has gotten in the way of that. Do what I say!" Hazelstar spat.

"Very well, Hazelstar," Fire sighed, exiting the den.

"Fire, send my son over!" Hazelstar spat. "I want a word with him!"

"Yes, Hazelstar!" he called, rushing off.

Within minutes, guards carried Treestep to Hazelstar's den. He struggled in their grasp, though he was tired and exhausted from a day's worth of training, and he struggled to stand up to face his mother.

"Did you bring me here to kill me?" he asked.

Hazelstar laughed. "Why? Your training looks as if it's killing you anyway. I only wished to talk."

"About what? My fate?" Treestep growled.

"You better watch that tongue, son. Sit," she commanded.

Treestep obeyed, his green eyes watching his mother with caution.

"What makes a good mother, Treestep?"

"What are you babbling about this time? Have you officially lost it?" he asked.

"What makes a good mother?"

Silence.

"Answer me!" Hazelstar spat.

Treestep rolled his eyes. "A good mother cares for her kits, raises them to be good warriors. A good mother doesn't plan her kit's path, but encourages her kit to choose the path she wishes. A good mother doesn't abuse her kit. A good mother loves her kit. A good mother doesn't send out her kit on a suicide mission and then take her kit captive and try to kill her kit's entire family!"

"That's enough!" Hazelstar spat.

She knew Treestep was describing his relationship with Hazelstar, but the words he had said reminded Hazelstar so much of her relationship with Moonstar. She had never been the favorite. Leopardtail was the greatest she-cat out of the bunch, always praised by Moonstar. But after her death, Hazelstar was the only one left to lead. She wondered if her sister had even ended up in the Dark Forest.

"Take him away!" Hazelstar decided at last.

"You've lost it! You've gone crazy!" came Treestep's howls as he was led away.

Hazelstar curled up in her nest, confused, wondering what to do. Was this the right path? Could she truly be evil?

"Stop doubting yourself!" she hissed.

Maybe I have lost it, she thought.

She closed her eyes, falling into a restless sleep.

"Moonstar," Hazelstar breathed, immediately bowing to her mother. She was in the Dark Forest, as she was most nights. Her mother

stood in front of her, her white teeth sharp and malicious.

Though her mother was smaller and more slender than Hazelstar, she was certainly more vicious and cunning.

"Hazelstar, why do you doubt yourself?" she asked.

"I-I don't, Mother," Hazelstar stammered.

"You can't even talk right," Moonstar hissed. "Why do you doubt yourself?"

"I do not. I am the leader of MoonClan. There is nothing to doubt," Hazelstar explained.

"But something's troubling you, isn't it? I see your thoughts and life, Hazelstar. You don't believe this is worth it. This is only a burden for you."

"No, this is all I've dreamed about," Hazelstar explained.

"LIAR!" Moonstar hissed. "Don't lie to me, daughter!"

"I'm carrying out your chore, that's what I'm doing!" she hissed.

Moonstar fell silent, which was even more deadly than her attacks.

"This is a chore for you, is it?" she asked, circling her daughter and laughing. "You were always to be the leader, Hazelstar. Not Tigerstripe, not Leopardtail, and certaintly not Chesnuttail. I gave this gift to you because I knew you'd do a good job."

"What does that have to do with anything? Why do you need the forest?"

"These cats have lost all hope," Moonstar explained. "The cats I grew up with were selfish and focused not on their warrior duties, but those around them. SnowClan and FoxClan have grown poisoned with selfishness. They are forgetting that to be a warrior

means to be fierce. They have grown up worshipping soft-spot cats who live in the stars, while the true cats are here in the Dark Forest."

Her mother's words confused Hazelstar.

"What do you mean?" Hazelstar asked.

"Why do cats end up in the Dark Forest?"

"Because they're bad?"

Moonstar laughed.

"No, they swim against the tide. They are rebellious. They want to create a different world in the forest. A world based around ferocity and fear, not a world of love. We can survive without love, but it is impossible to live without fear."

"You're confusing me," Hazelstar admitted.

"You're leading MoonClan for the greater good. The Dark Forest is the true leader, my dear. Imagine all that these cats can give us. Why, I've certainly visited you more than any StarClan cat, have I not? The Dark Forest continues to inspire us to battle hard and work hard. The entire forest will be yours to rule. You'll be well-fed, commanding these warriors around like slaves. Can you see it?"

"I-I guess," Hazelstar admitted. And she could see it. A world where she was leader, where cats bowed before her, where Dark Forest cats trained others. A world of darkness, a world of ferocity, a world of fear.

Pain shot through Hazelstar, and she wasn't sure why. It was as if the last of her doubts were exiting, and they were becoming more painful than ever.

Hazelstar stomped her paw down and unsheathed her long claws, baring her sharp teeth.

"I am a MoonClan leader, and I belong to the Dark Forest!"

she declared.

Chapter 24

Throughout the rest of the week, Hazelstar sat alone in her den, refusing to go outside to speak to any of her clanmates. Something changed in her the day Moonstar came. Something changed when she said she belonged to the Dark Forest.

She felt she had a new power, a new sense of darkness, growing inside her. And it frightened her. The power of darkness and fear frightened her, so much so she was afraid to go outside and use it. What if she killed the first cat that looked at her.

Fire many times had come over to tell her to make announcements, but she had only told him what to do and say. She knew she couldn't stay locked up forever though. If she remained weak, cats could disobey her, the prisoners could escape. Maybe she'd step outside today.

Fire dropped a mouse at her den, like he usually did. Hazelstar quickly snatched it and began to gobble it up. Fire remained near her.

"Any announcements you need me to make today, Hazelstar?"

Hazelstar shook her head.

"Why won't you come outside, Hazelstar? What happened after you attacked Crystal?" he asked.

"You better not be seeing that she-cat!" she spat.

"I'm not," Fire replied calmly. "I've obeyed you. We all obey you. What's the matter?"

"You don't understand. You don't know anything about me," she growled.

"I only want to help, Hazelstar," Fire offered. "You must

keep it together. You must remain strong. Our battle takes place in less than a moon, Hazelstar."

"It does?"

"You told me it had to take place shortly after the first leaf fell. Well, the first leaf has fallen. The colors of the leaves are changing. Leaf-fall is upon us."

"Already?" Hazelstar gasped.

"Yes, Hazelstar. What is troubling you?"

"There's darkness inside me, darkness I can't explain. She got into my head, Fire."

"Who?"

"Moonstar!" Hazelstar exclaimed. "She's poisoned me with thoughts of evil."

"Hazelstar, pull it together!" Fire hissed at last. "You are Hazelstar, not Moonstar! You will lead this clan to triumph! You've got all the lives you need! You will rule!"

I am Hazelstar, not Moonstar. I am Hazelstar, not Moonstar, Hazelstar repeated to herself again and again. Fire's words certainly weren't motivational, but Hazelstar felt as if she was healing, slowly.

Hazelstar slowly got to her paws, her legs shaking after days of lying on them. She unsheathed her claws and dug them into the dirt, growling. She belonged to the Dark Forest now, she was doing good for everyone.

"I am ready to step outside," Hazelstar said at last.

"Thank the Dark Forest. I thought I would have to take over as leader," Fire joked. Hazelstar did not laugh alongside him.

As soon as she stepped outside, light blinded her eyes. She blinked, finally becoming accustomed to the light.

"Good to see you, Hazelstar," cats murmured as they passed by. Had they really all been worrying for her?

As Hazelstar passed by the prisoner den, she saw Treestep raise an eyebrow and laugh quietly to himself. She could almost hear his thoughts. He was watching her, thinking: *She's officially lost it.*

But I haven't, Hazelstar reminded herself. She was still a strategic and strong she-cat. She would bring MoonClan to justice and rid the world of SnowClan, FoxClan, and NightClan, now that she knew they had allied with the other two.

Hazelstar proudly padded up her rock, watching as cats gathered beneath, curious to what Hazelstar would be discussing.

"CATS OF MOONCLAN!" she yowled. "I HAVE AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT!"

Cats gathered beneath her, their eyes fixed on their leader.

"I apologize for going so long without speaking," Hazelstar began, her eyes rapidly running back and forth nervously. "The Dark Forest is our leader, Moonstar is our founder. I am leading for them. I must remind you of that. Any who do not agree should leave MoonClan now before facing our wrath."

Silence remained.

"Good. Leaf-fall has begun. At the end of the moon, we will attack. You've been training hard for moons. This battle will be worth it. The other clans may have trained warriors, but they are not as fierce as us. They will be putting small apprentices in battle that can't fend for ourselves. We have strong apprentices and warriors. We will win this battle. We will have the Dark Forest on our side. We are carrying out Moonstar's word!"

Yowls of agreement sounded from the crowd.

Hazelstar grinned, watching as the still-injured Snowflake glared at Hazelstar before it turned into an innocent blink of eyes.

"Mentors, continue training your apprentices roughly. Do not hesitate on punishment. If they have not gotten their moves down by now, that is their fault. Extend practice if you must. Remember, only the strongest survive in this clan.

"As for the captives, our loyal members," Hazelstar said, smiling maliciously, "you, too, are a MoonClan warrior. I expect proper behavior. You've already experienced pain and punishment. Do not inflict any more upon yourself. Listen to your mentors, follow us, and you will be safe. You will fight with MoonClan. Any traitors will be killed. I already have cats signed up to watch you."

Looks of worry came from the captives, making Hazelstar grin.

"Remember who you all are. We may come from different clans, different places in the forest, but we are all united under one common force—The Dark Forest. Moonstar began this clan with a simple thought in mind—rid the forest of soft-spot kittypets who do not focus on the true meaning of being a warrior. And what is the true meaning of being a warrior? Many moons ago, in ancient times, we were lions, tigers, leopards...We could not live in harmony, so we split into clans. We could not live in harmony because we could not live in the forest together. To be a warrior means to be fierce and hate your enemies. That is why we will conquer this forest together and make it ours! None of you will go hungry, all of you will be safe, and you'll receive an entire forest for yourself!" Hazelstar shouted. "LONG LIVE MOONCLAN!"

Cats erupted in cheer, and Hazelstar leapt down from her rock.

"That had to be your best speech yet," Fire whispered to Hazelstar.

"It's strange," Hazelstar admitted. "I thought the darkness flooding inside me would trap me. I thought I wouldn't be able to control it. But I've had control of it all along, and it's lived inside me all this time. It's given me the ability to be stronger, to make wiser choices, to encourage others. I have no doubt we will win, Fire. Now, what do you think? You were a kit at the time of the first

battle."

"As were you, Hazelstar, but I recall you were on a different side..."

"I don't like to discuss my FoxClan days," Hazelstar growled. "I was a foolish young kit, thinking FoxClan could save me from my mother. Why did I need saving? Moonstar is the best thing that's happened to me. MoonClan has saved me..." But were the words she spoke true?

"Moonstar's strategy must not have been good enough," Fire explained to Hazelstar. "She fell only by a head injury. What a pathetic way to die. She only had one life, you know that? She couldn't even get the entire Dark Forest to rally behind her and give her lives."

"Don't insult her," Hazelstar growled, scared her mother would leave her with more clawmarks than she could count that night. "It's true. She needed more back-up. The Dark Forest was a fool for not using all its power to help MoonClan. I can't believe my brother and his family think StarClan will save them."

"It's a bit stupid, yes," Fire agreed.

"Tell me, Fire. I learned you and Fang joined a clan awhile back," Hazelstar spoke.

Fire's eyes widened. "What are you talking about?"

"Don't deny it. What clan did you join? A clan based around StarClan?"

Fire looked past Hazelstar. "Yes, we joined a clan, but we couldn't stay in it. It was too centered around StarClan, around good. I went back to the rogue life. If I couldn't live in MoonClan, why stay in a clan at all?"

"Good answer," Hazelstar laughed. "Crystal's kits will be born at the end of the moon."

"I know," Fire said. "I'm not supposed to see her though."

"No, you belong to me now to help me prepare for battle. Crystal will most likely not be fighting. You understand punishment must come, right?"

"But don't you..." Fire paused, tears glistening in his eyes. "Yes."

"Good answer, Fire. I warned you long ago of the dangers of that she-cat, and you didn't listen. Anyway, I must be off now to check on the others. You figure out where your true loyalties lie, Fire."

With that, she padded away, leaving the tom to sit alone in the camp, his eyes widened by fear.

Chapter 25

The rest of the moon passed by in the blink of an eye, and as the full moon came closer, Hazelstar realized it would be a matter of a few sunrises before they'd have to attack. Leaf-fall had fully arrived, and Hazelstar knew they had to attack before half of the leaves had fallen. So far, nearly a quarter had.

During the moon, Fire had strayed from Crystal, whose stomach grew. However, this didn't keep her from taking care of the rogues. Without Fire running after the she-cat, Hazelstar was able to get him to focus more on his deputyship if he were to lead one day.

"And if you become leader," she would warn, though she guessed he would die before being placed in that position. "You must choose a noble cat to lead MoonClan. Remember, we have fierce she-cats in the clans. Moonstar would prefer she-cats to lead instead of stupid toms."

Then Fire would nod vigorously before leaving to perform his chores.

Snowflake had healed, almost. She had a few scratches left, but she was up and walking again, crying tears as she was reunited with her mate and kits. Hazelstar tried to imagine a scenario where Moonstar would've done the same, though she knew nothing like that had ever happened. Even when she had returned to her mother, Moonstar had drove her off shortly after in a rage of fury.

You could've been that mother with her kits in FoxClan, came her terrible thoughts. It was at this time now that Hazelstar shook away these thoughts that had haunted her since she had taken up the mission. She simply cast them aside with the flick of tail, knowing her loyalty belonged solely to the Dark Forest.

"Hazelstar, do you wish to make an announcement?" came a call from her den.

Hazelstar padded towards the entrance, Fire pacing by her door.

"Yes, Fire. How has every cat been?" she asked as they walked outside, the cold air blowing against her pelt.

"Rogues are better, apprentices too. But what if we're not good enough, Hazelstar?"

She laughed in reply, one claw sinking into his foot.

"Do not doubt the power of the Dark Forest," she warned as she came closer to the rock she stood at. As she looked back at the frightened Fire, she guessed that if they truly did win the battle (which they would) she'd assign a better deputy. Her mother wouldn't mind.

"CATS OF MOONCLAN!" she yowled, watching as they quickly padded forward, bowing to their leader.

"I only seek your attention. I do not wish to harm you," she interrupted, watching their scared emotions. After many moons, their fear had grown, especially after she had nearly murdered Snowflake in front of her own kits.

"Nearly a quarter of the leaves have fallen, and I told myself we would attack when the first leaf fell. Well, I've pushed that back to attacking before half of the leaves fall, which will most likely be at the end of the next moon. However, the full moon is almost upon us, and it is at that time we will attack!"

Yowls of agreement sounded from below her, excited expressions lighting up their dark camp.

"When is the moon?!" a cat called.

"The full moon will be in four sunrises," she announced. "Four sunrises is all we have. We shall attack the day the full moon shines. It will be the day of the Gathering."

"A surprise attack?" someone asked.

Hazelstar shook her head. "Cats have been expecting this battle. No, I will send out messengers to let the cats know."

"Isn't that defeating the purpose?!" another cat asked.

"SILENCE!" Hazelstar shouted, scanning the crowd. "The other cats won't win. We know that. But we should at least let them try. It'll be fun watching as their hope fades to nothing on the battlefield. They'll tire themselves out and die quickly. We attack at sunrise.

"As for our training, I expect everyone to train hard and long these next few days. On the last day, we will train early in the morning, and then save our energy for the next day when the full moon comes. Mentors, train your apprentices hard. Make sure they've mastered every move. If they haven't, then they will die in battle. Remind them of that.

"Captives will be expected to fight too, so I remind you all to remain loyal to MoonClan," she growled at her brother and his kin. "If you do not fight, I have assigned cats to kill you in the most horrible way," she growled, glancing at rogues she had chosen for the life of each captive.

"Prove yourself, and they will not kill you. Then, you too will share in the glory of this forest after we have killed off the others. Now, who is ready to claim what is ours?!"

Yowls echoed through the woods, loud and long. They went on for a few minutes before Hazelstar eventually silenced them.

"GET TO WORK!" she shouted.

As she padded down her rock, Rainwhisker, a captive, came running towards her. He had seen better days now that he was stick thin with droopy eyes. He still trained, not nearly as hard enough as the others, but he had proven to be a good addition to the clan with his medicine cat skills.

"Hazelstar," he whimpered.

"WHAT?!"

"Uh, I..."

"Spit it out!" she spat, knocking him over with a swipe of a paw.

As Rainwhisker rose to his feet, shaking dirt off him, he took in a deep breath. "Crystal's kits are expected any day. Will she be required to fight in battle?"

Hazelstar groaned. "No, but I'll kill her or the kits sooner or later. You may tend to them, but you will fight in battle, understand?"

"Y-Yes, Hazelstar," Rainwhisker nodded, scurrying off back into the medicine cat den.

Seconds later, Fire came rushing towards Hazelstar.

"Her kits will be born soon, Hazelstar!" he shouted. "May I please see Crystal?"

"She's not giving birth now, is she?" Hazelstar asked.

Fire nodded. "She is. Rainwhisker just told me."

"Very well. Go see the she-cat. I will witness this birth too," she agreed, following him towards the medicine cat den. Rainwhisker bowed in a humble manner as she entered.

As Fire rushed to his mate's side, Hazelstar leaned against the wall as the she-cat shut her eyes. It was amazing. The she-cat did not scream at all or let out the tiniest cry of pain. It almost made Hazelstar want to forgive her for what she had done.

"Bite down on this stick," Rainwhisker instructed.

Crystal did as she was told, letting out a large screech as pain passed through her. Hazelstar smiled, knowing that no matter how hard she tried, she could not hold back the pain.

For some reason, Hazelstar thought back to when she was in the woods, her stomach plump and full. She had no medicine cat,

no mate. She took on all of the pain as she gave birth in the woods to her only kit, Treewhisker. Crystal acted like a spoiled kittypet.

"The first one is coming!" Rainwhisker shouted.

Hazelstar watched a a tumble of ginger fur slid out onto the moss. He was a tabby, like his father.

"A tom!" Fire exclaimed.

When will that sexist tom learn she-cats are better? Hazelstar thought.

She waited as the next was born. This time, it was a ginger she-cat who looked similar to the tom. She watched as Crystal let out a faint smile before another ripple of pain passed.

"One more!" Rainwhisker urged.

The last kit was born. Instead of looking like its father, this kit was a white she-cat, who looked similar to Crystal.

Crystal breathed in relief, turning to face her three new kits. She licked the tops of their heads, grinning as they suckled.

"What will they name them?" she purred at Fire.

"The tom can be called Ember," he suggested.

Hazelstar giggled to herself, seeing as how Fire would probably name each kit after himself in some sort of way.

"And the ginger she-cat, Flame," he announced.

Crystal nodded, gazing at the white she-cat.

"She can be called Thrush," Crystal announced.

"Beautiful," Hazelstar muttered.

Crystal's eyes widened as she looked at her leader.

"Fire, Rainwhisker, get out. I have to have a small

discussion with Crystal," Hazelstar snapped.

The two toms obeyed, though Fire eyed Hazelstar with discussion.

"What will you do to me?" Crystal asked almost immediately.

Hazelstar laughed. "You already know I'm furious, now that you won't be in the battle. Instead, you'll be here with your precious kits, watching from the safety of this nursery."

Crystal's lip quivered as she held her gaze.

"I have given you a choice, Crystal," Hazelstar announced.

"A choice?"

"I will let you decide who dies," Hazelstar said calmly.

Crystal's eyes widened.

"Why?! Why must you kill?! Haven't you had enough blood sticking to your sharp claws? What is the purpose? What does it bring you? Joy?!"

"DO NOT QUESTION ME!" Hazelstar spat. "Or else I might just kill everyone instead of giving you a choice."

"What are the choices? What will your revenge be?" Crystal asked softly.

"I have three options. The first is Fire will be killed. Wouldn't it be great seeing you break apart without that mate of yours?" she snickered.

"You-you wouldn't," Crystal gasped. "He's your deputy!"

Hazelstar shrugged. "To tell you the truth, I've been thinking about assigning a new deputy for days. He means nothing to me, and neither do you. That, my dear, is the second option."

"Kill me?" she gasped.

Hazelstar nodded.

"If you did, Fire and the kits, they would not die," Crystal announced.

"Yes, but think now. Who will nurse the kits? No cat. They will die without a mother, and their father will be heartbroken."

"What's the last option?" Crystal gulped.

"Kill all but one kit," she growled.

"Kill my kits?!" Crystal gasped.

"Or I can just kill all of you!"

"NO! I WON'T DO ANY OF THEM!" Crystal shouted. "WHY DO YOU NEED TO SEEK REVENGE?!"

"What will it be, she-cat?"

Crystal pondered, tears forming in her eyes. "If you kill Fire, they will grow up fatherless, alone. If I am killed, my kits will die, Fire will be alone. And if I..." She paused, glancing up at Hazelstar. "I-I'll kill them," she murmured.

Hazelstar laughed. "Perfect. Choose wisely, she-cat. Which one will live?"

Crystal glanced around, sobbing as she looked at her three beautiful kits. Hazelstar watched as she stopped at the small ginger she-cat.

"Flame. Flame lives."

Hazelstar tilted her head. "Not the strong tom or the beautiful white she-cat?"

"Flame," Crystal repeated.

"Fine. Flame lives. They'll be killed after we win. If you tell

Fire of this, I'll kill you all!" Hazelstar spat, padding out the den as she listened to Crystal's cries.

Where Hazelstar expected to feel pleasure and hate, she felt as if her heart were full of sorrow for the sobbing she-cat.

Chapter 26

Hazelstar awoke with excitement. Today was their last day before the battle, and there was so much she had to complete, so much she had to do.

The clan had been training hard, practicing and perfecting moves. She would listen to the cries as mentors scolded their apprentices, listening to the unsheathing and sharpening of claws. She no longer heard the mews of warmth or purrs of love, but the vicious cries and yowls of victory. The Dark Forest had opened her up to new sounds she had not recognized in FoxClan.

At night, she'd hear Crystal's wailing. Several times, Hazelstar was forced to exit her den and lecture the she-cat, telling her that she could easily just kill off everyone in Crystal's family instead of the two kits.

Then, Crystal would remain silent until the next night.

Hazelstar knew everything would play out well soon. Crystal's two kits would be killed after the battle, Fire would lose his position as deputy, and the forest would be theirs. How exciting that would be!

"I'm doing this for you, Mother," Hazelstar whispered in the darkness of the den. "Soon, the Dark Forest will lead us, with you as their ruler."

All these moons, and Hazelstar was finally completing what her mother had set out to do. Yet, she hadn't gotten a simple thank-you. Her visits had been scoldings, yowling, and once in awhile, wounds. She knew her mother was just trying to get Hazelstar to do her best, but why could she not thank Hazelstar for all the hard work she had done?

Hazelstar shook her head, ignoring the thought. Her mother would praise her by tomorrow evening, she was sure of that.

"Hazelstar, are you ready to make announcements?" Fire asked.

"I have several announcements to make today," Hazelstar told Fire. "Let's start with the captives. Get them and their mentors, all right?"

"I will," Fire said, quickly rushing off. Hazelstar padded towards the captive den where the rogues kept guard. Inside, it was silent, except for a few small cries.

"Bring them out here," Hazelstar instructed the guards. Slowly, the captives marched out in a single file line, tired and exhausted. Their eyes were bloodshot, their ribs showing, mud and blood mixed on their pelts.

"Very good," Hazelstar purred, eyeing the captives. "Will their mentors come forward?" she asked, motioning the mentors forward.

They obeyed Hazelstar's orders, standing beside their apprentices.

"Bone, let's start with you," Hazelstar suggested.

Bone seemed surprised, but he nodded, gazing at Tigerstripe and Jetfur. Tigerstripe glanced up at Hazelstar, letting out a low growl.

"Tigerstripe, I thought Bone had taught you manners," Hazelstar snapped.

"They'll do fine, Moonstar," Bone began. "They're still MoonClan cats through and through. If we just give them a little motivation, they'll do what they're told tomorrow."

"Perfect," Hazelstar purred. "You here that Tigerstripe, Jetfur? You'll be back on the battlefield tomorrow."

Jetfur mumbled quietly while Tigerstripe refused to make eye contact. Hazelstar continued, watching as each mentor gave an explanation on their apprentices' training. She would nod, eyeing

them, inflicting a tiny bit of pain on some, but not much.

"Now then, I'll talk to the captives alone now," she told the mentors. The guards still stood, and Hazelstar grinned, eyeing the FoxClan cats.

"Excited for tomorrow?" she asked.

"No," Chesnuttail growled.

"Brother, you're this close to getting your head ripped off," she spat. "I expect respect when I speak to all of you! Understand?"

Cats nodded vigorously, while some just rolled their eyes.

"I don't understand why you cannot learn respect. I am *helping* you. This forest will be yours to roam free in. When the sun rises tomorrow, your clan, your family, your friends, will be dead. And you, you will rise with MoonClan in glory and will continue this glorious breed of clan cats."

Another huff of amusement echoed from one of the cats.

Hazelstar immediately turned her head towards Treestep.

"Son, what's so funny?"

"You're insane," he muttered.

"ENOUGH!" Hazelstar snapped. "I'll kill one of your kits. How about that?!" she snapped, edging closer to Treestep. "Or your mate? Lovely Rosecloud," she growled, shoving a claw into Rosecloud's paw. The she-cat cried in pain, and Treestep's eyes widened.

"No, no please," he begged.

"Then I expect you to act well-behaved. The next cat to interrupt is slaughtered, understand?"

They nodded, and Hazelstar continued her speech.

"You already know cats are assigned to kill you if you misbehave, so choose wisely. The second you turn against us, the second the light leaves your eyes. And what a shame it would be to see young kits watch their parents die...You will fight for MoonClan tomorrow, and afterwards, you will stay with us. It'll be a happy life, just you wait. A forest all to yourselves!"

"Get some rest, and we'll bring you food. We must keep you in shape for tomorrow," Hazelstar told them. After they were escorted away, Hazelstar found Fire.

"Let's speak to the rogues now," she told him.

Fire nodded, leading her into the woods towards the clearing where the rogues were being kept. Instantly, they all stood up and paused their talking and eating to greet the leader. Hazelstar found the fallen tree and climbed on top of it, facing the many rogues who stood, watching her.

"ROGUES!" she yowled. "Tomorrow is the battle, and I must thank you all for training hard, guarding, and even sacrificing some of your own for our sake. Tomorrow, you will share in the glory of the forest with MoonClan!"

Yowls of glory sounded from the group of cats.

"TOMORROW, YOU BECOME A MEMBER OF MOONCLAN!"

More shouts erupted, and Hazelstar waited patiently until they finally quieted down.

"But there is also something I must warn you about. If you do not choose to fight, you will have the same fight as the captives. Fight or face death. It is your choice. I do not know if there is an afterlife for you kind," she growled. "Fight with us, share in our treasures, and bring honor to this clan. You will make others proud, and one day, kits will whisper about the great rogues who helped bring the forest to MoonClan."

Cats grinned and chatted eagerly. Hazelstar laughed. They were so stubborn, so vulnerable, thinking they too could share in

the wonders of MoonClan. They would most likely be guards at the edge of the forest, hunters, gatherers. They would do the work MoonClan cats did not want.

"Sleep well! Eat well! Tomorrow, we win!" Hazelstar shouted as she exited. Cats yowled in excitement, and Hazelstar eagerly followed Fire back to camp where she would make a formal announcement to her members.

As soon as Hazelstar's foot touched the large rock, cats began to gather, expecting Hazelstar to make her speech at this moment. At this time, it had begun to get later in the day, and the sun was already setting in the leaf-fall forest.

"CATS OF MOONCLAN!" she shouted, standing at the top of the rock. Cats gathered below, their eyes widened with excitement as they awaited Hazelstar's glorious speech.

"What happens tomorrow?" she asked.

Immediately, "THE BATTLE OF MOONCLAN!" was shouted throughout the clan.

"You're right! Tomorrow, this forest belongs to us!" she shouted. "You've all done fabulously in this clan, working hard, training hard. I'm excited for what tomorrow holds. We have strong rogues, great warriors, and even captives working for us. This forest will surely be ours. We have outnumbered the clans tremendously. Only a miracle from StarClan could save them," she said, laughing.

"As soon as the sun peeks above the hill, we shall descend into the clearing in SnowClan where the battle will take place. The cats will soon greet us, and as soon as you hear my call, we attack. Do not spare any cat. Kill any cat that gets in your way. We shall kill each SnowClan, FoxClan, and NightClan cat. Any who survive this battle will be taken as slaves, understand?"

Cats nodded.

"Do not betray MoonClan. I can easily kill you, just like the captives and the cats we will fight tomorrow. A MoonClan cat who

betrays deserves death. Now, before you rest, please, let us offer our thanks to Moonstar, to the Dark Forest. If you would please join me," Hazelstar told them. Cats bowed their heads, and Hazelstar stared into the now night-sky, watching the moon dazzle.

"Moonstar, Mother, founder of MoonClan, we thank you for this opportunity to anew the forest, and we ask for yours and the Dark Spirit's blessing, guidance, and help as we battle the clans tomorrow. Without your dedication and genius plan, Moonstar, this would not have been made possible, and we'd be stuck with kittypet clan cats. When we win, MoonClan will be what you always wanted it to be, Moonstar. Please, let the Dark Forest come upon us," Hazelstar concluded.

Suddenly, a crack of lightning sounded from the sky, and before Hazelstar could look up, dark clouds had swirled around the MoonClan camp, howls of evil, cries of innocent cats, circling the camp.

"The Dark Forest," she gasped.

A few MoonClan cats screeched, but others remained frozen. In these clouds, Hazelstar could see other Dark Forest cats, including those who had died in the previous battle. Dark energy surged inside Hazelstar until a malicious laugh of victory escaped from her mouth.

Then, as the clouds began to fade away, cats began to glance around, looking for explanation. Suddenly, there came a gasp.

Hazelstar turned, and standing next to her was Moonstar.

Moonstar grinned, her eyes flashing red before turning back to her usual green.

"MoonClan! Hazelstar!" she purred, facing the cats. The MoonClan cats cowered in fear, but Moonstar only laughed.

"Do not fret. I won't hurt my loyal clanmates," she told them. "I have only come to wish you luck on the battle tomorrow.

With the power of the Dark Forest, you will surely win. I'll be watching, assisting you in any way I can. And Hazelstar," she turned, facing Hazelstar.

Hazelstar froze in fear at the sight of her mother.

"Don't fail me," she grinned, then disappeared into the shadows, laughing maliciously.

Hazelstar nodded slowly, then ushered the cats to bed. Still, seeing Moonstar beside her had frightened her, and she knew that if she failed Moonstar, she would surely get punished for it.

"I won't fail," she told herself as she padded into her den to rest. "MoonClan will live on."

Chapter 27

Hazelstar awoke with ambition, ready to bring down the clans. Before the light had even touched the sky, Fire had woken her, telling her the sun would be up soon. Hazelstar nodded and padded out from her den, the rest of the clan sleeping in silence. She had sent messengers the night before to the other clans, warning of them of their destruction that would take place the next morning.

Now Hazelstar stood, a rabbit in her paws. She glanced down at it, but she could not eat it. She knew she shouldn't be nervous, but her nerves clenched her. What if they truly couldn't beat the clans?

Mouse-dung, she told herself. *You've outnumbered them.*

Hazelstar repeated this over and over, knowing they had more members, knowing that only a miracle could save them. In a few hours, the forest would be theirs and Moonstar's mission would be completed. Hazelstar would please her mother.

"Eat, Hazelstar. It'll be good for you," Fire urged.

Little does he know I'm kicking him out of the deputy spot, she smirked.

Hazelstar obeyed him though, taking small bites of her rabbit. When she ate all that she felt she could, she stood up, watching as the sky turned from indigo to a lighter blue. The sun had begun to rose.

"EVERY CAT UP!" she shouted, parading around the camp. Cats began to rise, though she continued to shout, padding through the forest so that the rogues could hear her.

"EVERY CAT UP!" she shouted again. "ROGUES! MEET IN

THE CAMP!"

Cats began to gather in camp, their numbers swarming. She padded up her rock, Fire padding up beside her. She stood, smiling down at the cats. Guards brought the captives forward, and Hazelstar smiled at their tired and exhausted eyes. They'd die in battle most likely. Still, she had to hope a few would survive. Moonstar's offspring had to continue.

"Is every cat ready and awake?!" she yowled. Yowls of agreement sounded below, some snorts of disgust coming from the captives. She could've killed them off right then, but it didn't matter. She'd already spoken to the rogues about killing them off if they misbehaved.

"TODAY, WE FIGHT FOR MOONCLAN, THE DARK FOREST!" she shouted. The cheer of cats rang in triumph and Hazelstar smiled. Still, her heart beat rapidly, scared Moonstar would appear out of thin air again.

"Now," Hazelstar began. "Today, we are going down to the meadow on SnowClan's border. We'll most likely be the first ones there, but it's been said that the first to arrive to battle are the winners. Some rogues, I've spoken to you already, will be guarding our territory and the camp in case some cats want to plan a raid. They won't come back alive. All the rest of us will be out there fighting for our clan. We surely will win, I can tell you that.

"Now, Crystal, however," Hazelstar began, glancing at the nursery. Cats turned, confused. "She won't be joining us."

Yowls of arguments came from this.

"Now shush, shush. She decided to have kits at this time. There's something in store for her later. Still, I don't expect you to praise her later during the celebration after she did not fight. But let's ignore this for now, and focus on the battle. There will be no mercy. Kill any cat in your way. Even if every cat is not killed, we will make slaves out of the live ones. Now, are you ready?!"

Yowls of agreement came, and Hazelstar laughed

maliciously.

"LET US BRING MOONCLAN BACK!"

The cats padded through the forest, Hazelstar and Fire leading the way. Though he did not sound worried, he showed it. She could tell by the way he darted his eyes back and forth quickly, by the way his paws skipped a step. Last battle, he had been a young kit and had watched his sister die in battle. But Hazelstar too had been in battle as she watched her mate die in front of her. She'd been fighting for MoonClan then, even if the FoxClan cats had thought she perhaps was fighting for them.

After Rockclaw had fallen dead, however, she had fled. She supposed all this had been punishment for her behavior.

The sun had just risen over the hills, casting its golden rays on the forest below. The meadow sat just on the other side of the SnowClan border. It was already visible from where the cats stood.

Hazelstar began to rush now, racing down the hill towards the SnowClan border. She strayed from the NightClan border, walking along the edge of FoxClan's until the meadow sat, the perfect distance between the SnowClan and FoxClan border.

"Take a deep breath. We are entering SnowClan territory," she purred. She took a step forward, immediately recognizing the new SnowClan scent. The FoxClan scent had been familiar to her. After all, she'd grown up there, but this SnowClan scent was new.

The meadow was quiet, just as it had always been. The army gathered, patiently waiting for the cats to arrive.

The sun was halfway up the hill when SnowClan and FoxClan had arrived, side-by-side. NightClan came behind them, yowling as they prepared to fight. She watched the clans together, grinning. She knew they were too small, and they surely would lose.

As they stood, lined up against MoonClan, Hazelstar gave a simple command:

"MOONCLAN, ATTACK!" she shouted.

The first blood had been spilled. Cats shrieked and cried, rushing to greet their partners in battle. Hazelstar grinned, shoving cats away, trying to get a better view of the battle. She had five lives, and there was no way she'd die in this battle.

A calico tom knocked her down, but Hazelstar ended his life in mere seconds. She then scampered forward, catching sight of the cats fighting, at times pushing cats away and injuring them.

She watched as a black tom fought valiantly, only to die by his opponent's claw. His mate cried in exasperation, then died moments later.

Hazelstar laughed, though she felt darkness inside her. She had not laughed when Rockclaw had died. Losing a mate had been hard.

Oh, it's no time for my stupid FoxClan thoughts to come back now! she thought, striking the nearest cat down by her.

She climbed up a nearby rock, watching the cats fight. Rogues fell dead, but they didn't count. The opponents were losing warriors rapidly as some were injured and others killed.

She watched a ginger tom cry out in shock, sobbing hysterically at the sight of his dead mate on the battlefield.

She watched a mother and her warrior kit fall together.

Was this really what Moonstar had wanted?

Hazelstar didn't know why all these thoughts were coming back to her so suddenly. She quickly grabbed a few rogues from the battle.

"Go find the SnowClan camp. Kill the elders and the queens. They won't do us any good as slaves."

The group of rogues nodded and rushed off, leaving Hazelstar to fight. She sat on the rock impatiently, slashing at cats who came near her. She would not die like Moonstar. She would not bang her head on a simple rock.

The battle continued. Cats fell, the golden meadow became soaked with red blood. She grinned, unsheathing her claws to knock a cat creeping up behind her. The cat fell below, as if he had never climbed up the rock.

Moments later, a few rogues returned, out of breath.

"We've killed most of the warriors. Some are attempting to fight," one breathed.

"THEN GO BACK AND HELP!" she screeched, issuing them off. They nodded, rushing past her to head back towards the SnowClan camp.

Hazelstar swished her tail back and forth. The SnowClan, NightClan, and FoxClan cats were losing warriors rapidly, and she could already tell they would lose. If she knew she was guaranteed victory, why did she feel an empty feeling inside? Had it been too easy? The sun had only just risen over the hill.

Suddenly, a cat appeared by her. Hazelstar was about to swipe when she stared into Moonstar's green eyes.

"MOTHER!" Hazelstar gasped, nearly losing your balance.

"Careful, you'll die that way!" she spat, laughing as she padded down the rock. Hazelstar followed her.

"Mother, are you here to fight?"

"Of course!" Moonstar laughed, killing a cat beside her easily. "I want to fight in this battle too, you know. You're completing *my* mission."

"Yes, of course," Hazelstar nodded.

"They're dying quickly," Moonstar observed. "The forest will be ours in moments. You'll see. They'll retreat soon."

Hazelstar nodded, but the cats did not retreat. They kept on fighting, knowing they'd die, knowing they'd lose.

"Why do they keep fighting?" Hazelstar whispered to herself.

"Because they have nothing else to fight for," Moonstar replied, overhearing her thoughts. "They don't want to serve us. They'd rather die defending their clan."

"But they'll lose."

"Of course they will. I don't see why they think dying is better," Moonstar commented.

Hazelstar glanced up, seeing another group of cats gather at the top of the hill. BirdClan. She'd run into them on the way to receive her nine lives. Were they going to help too?

Hazelstar got her mother's attention and pointed to the cats perched on the top of the hill.

"They're cowards, probably debating whether they should risk it," Moonstar explained. "They won't fight."

"STOP YOUR FIGHTING!" came a yowl.

"Oh, for the Dark Forest's sake, if it's another stupid apprentice!" Moonstar muttered, climbing up the rock. Hazelstar followed behind, but it was no apprentice.

A white and golden she-cat stood before them, her blue eyes fixed on Moonstar and Hazelstar in anger.

Cats began to stop their fighting to face the she-cat.

"Shinypelt, what are you doing?!" a black and white she-cat gasped.

"I understand the prophecy now, Mother," the she-cat replied.

"Shinypelt, no," her mate called, his eyes widened in fear.

Moonstar moved forward as if she were mist, floating down

below to face the brave she-cat.

"You can't defeat us!" she spat. "Look around you, at the blood, at the bodies of your clanmates."

"Oh, but I can," Shinypelt replied calmly.

Before any cat could speak or move, the she-cat shut her eyes, and her pelt began to glow.

"No," Moonstar gasped quietly, loud enough that Hazelstar could hear her.

The pelt grew brighter, suddenly beginning to blind any cat nearby. Hazelstar gasped, the light hurting her eyes and causing her body to fall in gasps of pain. The she-cat rose into the air, her blue eyes and bright pelt lighting up the forest.

Moonstar's yowl of pain rang among the clan, and Hazelstar gasped, her vision cloudy and her body in pain.

"No...no..." she murmured, trying to move.

I didn't want to choose this, she told herself.

Suddenly, a light lit up the forest, and Hazelstar felt her body growing heavier, the pain growing stronger.

"I didn't want to be a MoonClan cat!" she yowled as one last yowl of Moonstar could be heard. Then, the forest fell dark.

Epilogue

Hazelstar didn't like the Dark Forest. It was dark, cold, and wet, even worse than MoonClan. She knew she had deserved her punishment, and she knew she would never be in StarClan.

She had awoken moments later, to find herself dead.

"But I had five lives!" she argued with herself.

How could a she-cat with such a bright pelt kill everyone?

Because as soon as Hazelstar arrived, her clanmates did as well. Every cat who had been in that meadow who had possessed a certain evil had been killed. Even the rogues who had been fighting in the SnowClan camp had appeared, furious with Hazelstar.

"It's your fault! Why didn't Moonstar tell you of that she-cat?!" they spat at her.

Hazelstar would hide in the trees, her head buried in her paws. She didn't understand why they were so upset. It was Moonstar's fault. She had kept hidden the Shinypelt cat, never mentioning how she had been able to drive Moonstar away once before.

Tigerstripe hadn't appeared with her, neither had Jetfur. In fact, none of the FoxClan cats had arrived. She had turned to the rogues she had assigned in anger, but they only shrunk down, amused. They'd been too busy fighting to realize the cats had been fighting with their clan.

At least Hazelstar had seen Rockclaw again. She'd met him one day by the pond, confused as to why he'd appeared in the Dark Forest. He'd told her of the endless amount of she-cats he had become mates with and left, a truly evil act. When Hazelstar asked if he was going to leave her, he told her that he was going to if he had not died.

So in only a few days, Hazelstar had lost her dignity, pride, mate, and authority. It was her fault, falling for Moonstar's plan.

Moonstar had been vanished from eternity of course. Already being a dead cat, the blast from StarClan had caused her to disappear. At least she wouldn't be around to boss Hazestar anymore.

So now, Hazelstar spent her days in the Dark Forest alone. She'd left the other clan cats a few days after the battle. She'd run into her father, Fang, talking to him for only a moment before she disappeared again.

But here, at least she found peace and quiet. She supposed other cats were lying in a golden meadow in StarClan, feasting on divine rabbit. Here, she was lucky to catch so much as an ugly toad.

As Hazelstar padded through thick swamps and green foliage, she sighed. She guessed it wasn't even fair to call herself Hazelstar anymore, and so from that moment on, she went back to being Hazelnose.

Hazenose padded across slippery stone steps, glancing down at a darkened river that had been polluted.

"What a dump," she muttered, sitting atop a dirt hill with not a single speck of living grass to be found.

Hearing the sound of footsteps, she froze, wondering if one of her ex-clanmates had found her and was going to kill her.

That was one thing Hazelnose was scared of. She was scared one of those cats would vanish her from all existence.

She knew she would not be like Moonstar and use her powers of evil on the living, but still, she did not want to vanish.

Hazelnose licked her paw, glancing into bushes, wondering if a cat were nearby. When she heard nothing, she relaxed, guessing it had been a branch falling.

Then, suddenly, her heart began to pound heavily against

her chest.

From a green bush were a pair of red glowing eyes. Hazelnose could only get the she-cat's name out of her mouth by the time they disappeared.

"Moonstar," she gasped.

DUN DUN DUN! (No sequel, but there will be an explanation in the Author's Note)

Author's Note

Dear Reader,

Wow, I had no idea this would get so much success. This book is even more popular than its predecessor *Moonstar's Rise.* (But I think that's probably because this book is written better and a bit more longer/complex).

First off, let me just say I love writing from an evil perspective. It's always a lot of fun writing from the viewpoint of a cat who is seeking vengeance in an evil way. But I really loved writing from Hazelstar more than Moonstar. Hazelstar was not so much evil, but confused. She was led to believe that in order to please her mother, she had to perform this dangerous task. Because of her and her mother's ignorance, this plan failed. I believe that Moonstar's ignorance is certainly a fatal flaw that is passed down to her daughter, Hazelstar.

I actually had never planned to write a sequel, but there were so many instances in role-playing that I had brought Moonstar back, I came up with the idea that MoonClan should return. It was only a thought at first, and I actually had planned to role-play this a year or so before I actually did. There was a lot of thought put into this.

I'm glad everyone was incredibly enthusiastic about this book. Still, I'm a little concerned about you guys saying you'd be great MoonClan warriors (you're not all evil, right? Just kidding haha). Thanks for all your comments and likes.

I know many of you expected a sequel, and that's what I'm here to talk about. This is the MoonClan series, and there are only two books. If you do not know already, my role-playing came to an end about a year ago, and I never planned to bring MoonClan back. It would just be the same plotline repeating over, I assume.

But in the epilogue, there is something that points to a sequel. Moonstar is still in the Dark Forest, and the powers of StarClan did

not rid her. Why? Well, it's not a direct sequel, but my other Warriors novel *Shining of the Four* answers a lot of these questions. *Shining of the Four* follows the battle, focusing around the memory of Shinypelt. If you want to crave your Moonstar wanting, then I recommend this book for you! I think it's actually one of my, if not, best Warriors fanfic.

Thank you for all your support, guys! You're all amazing! Thanks for inspiring me to write these novels!

~Maeve